1991

Assertoric Validity In Journalistic News Judgment

Hendrik Overduin

ASSERTORIC VALIDITY
IN JOURNALISTIC NEWS JUDGMENT

by

Hendrik Overduin

Department of Philosophy

Submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Graduate Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario
September, 1991

ISBN 0-315-66295-6

A B S T R A C T

The thesis defended in this dissertation is that there is an objective, assertoric validity condition, or rationality constraint, on journalistic news judgments about reports that refer to events or states of affairs.

The dissertation locates such judgments in a Habermasian context of communicative action in which they are seen as making a unique, objective validity claim through the illocutionary force of published news narratives.

It is argued that neither truth of the information content of reports judged to be newsworthy, nor alleged qualities of the events reported, nor journalistic conventions can establish the validity of news judgments.

Using concepts from the mathematical theory of information along lines suggested by Dretske, a "core concept of news" is developed. The assertoric validity of a news judgment is then accounted for in terms of a "pragmatic information measure" which, adapting arguments from Salmon, applies the frequentist concept of probability to single events in the determination of their objective surprisal value. Validity of a news judgment proper is then defined in terms of this core concept of news and the pragmatic information measure.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to express sincerest appreciation to my advisor, Prof. Robert W. Binkley, and the members of the committee, Professors M. A. Wylie and W. G. Demopoulos. Their criticism and encouragement were highly valued in the preparation of this dissertation.

I also wish to thank Prof. Peter Desbarats, Dean of the Graduate School of Journalism, and Prof. Andrew MacFarlane, Director of the Centre for Mass Media Studies, for their encouragement and support. I also acknowledge with much gratitude the cheers along the way from colleagues and staff of that School as this work progressed.

Last and foremost, I thank my wife, Dee, who created the resources to allow me to do this work.

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INTRODUCTION

Journalistic News Judgment as Communicative Action

The subject matter of this dissertation is the epistemic dimension of journalistic news judgment, the claim that some information, usually a timely report about some state of affairs or event, constitutes news. My thesis is that there are certain objective conditions such judgments must meet if they are to be regarded as "rational" or "credible." When a news judgment meets these conditions, it can be said to be "assertorically valid", i.e. the journalist is justified to assert the news judgment.

My treatise is also an attempt to take up Frankel's challenge that philosophy address practical affairs and develop a "philosophy of practice" for the professions.[1] In the present case, that profession or practice is journalism.

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[1] Charles Frankel, "Philosophy of Practice," in Ethics and Social Justice, Howard E. Kiefer and Milton K. Munitz, eds. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1968.

Frankel's argument for this turn in philosophy makes the point that "...there are questions that arise within specific practices which practitioners, locked within the practice, may not normally detect or may be incompetent to assess in all their dimensions."[2] The questions are those that arise when "values enshrined by certain [professional] routines clash with values that stem from the outside."[3] While journalism is not specifically mentioned by Frankel, it meets all his conditions to count as a "practice"[4] and hence this dissertation can also be seen as a first step in the development of a philosophy of journalism.[5]

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[2] Frankel, op.cit., p. 13.

[3] Ibid. To see the validity of this point, one need only think of some of the well-known problems of biomedical ethics. Similarly, there are several common, and much-discussed "value-clash" problems associated with the practice of journalism, e.g. the right to privacy vs. the right to know, or freedom of the press (First Amendment) rights vs. national security.

[4] It deals with (i) "forced options" -- journalists must fill a certain space, or time slot, with 'news' whether there is any or not by a certain 'deadline'; (ii) deals with "change" and is "future oriented", and (iii) takes place within "highly determinate social contexts in which certain matters must be largely, though not entirely, taken as given. Among the matters that must be taken for granted are a machinery of action, a set of inherited ends or purposes and a professional doctrine, tacit or explicit." Ibid., 6 - 7.

[5] The purpose, and utility, of such a philosophical understanding of journalism would be, in Frankel's terms: "...to sort out the issues, clarifying the terms of discussion and indicating the relationship between practical decisions made amidst the urgencies of the moment and more

In this introductory chapter I will set out the logically distinct dimensions of journalistic news judgment in general, and argue for the uniqueness of what I will call the "news judgment proper". Fundamental to the recognition of this uniqueness is the fact that journalistic news judgments proceed from a social, communicative action orientation. After indicating the general significance of my subject, and the paucity of the philosophical literature on the topic, the remainder of this chapter seeks to motivate my use of Habermas's theory of communicative action[6] as the context for the analysis and arguments to come.

Journalistic News Judgment

I will be using the expression "journalistic news judgment" to stand for the overall process, or professional

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far-reaching ideals of human excellence and possibilities....So conceived, the philosophy of practice would be practice's gadfly, alerting practitioners to the premises and the larger non-professional implications of their thinking." Ibid., p. 13. My own view of what a "philosophy of journalism" should be about is sketched in the concluding chapter of this dissertation.

[6] Jürgen Habermas, The Theory of Communicative Action, Thomas McCarthy, trsl. Boston: Beacon Press, 1984. The work is in two volumes and was originally published in German in 1981. Volume I is entitled Reason and the Rationalization of Society, and Volume II, Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason. [Hereafter references to these works will be indicated by Habermas, I and Habermas, II.]

practice, of 'newsmaking'[7] by journalists. This process consists of three, logically-distinct levels or dimensions, each of which leads to a judgment or decision.[8] Those decisions, or judgments, are:

(i) the news judgment proper, a determination that a report R(●)[9] about some event or state of

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[7]'Newsmaking' is a term used by social scientists to emphasize the external constraints, individual, professional, bureaucratic and commercial, on the news reporting function of journalism. Such studies do not address the philosophical questions related to what I will call news judgment proper below. Cf. Mark Fischman, Manufacturing the News, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980; Bernard Roschco, Newsmaking, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975, and Gaye Tuchman, Making News, New York: Free Press. 1978.

[8]My description of the newsmaking process, though consistent with many "models" in mass communication research, is a kind of meta-model, depicting different levels of judgment, or argument. Cf. Dennis McQuail, Communication Models, London: Longmans, 1981, and his Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction. Second Edition. Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1987. Cf. also one of the few co-operative efforts between journalism teachers and philosophers, a short article by William E. Rowley, the journalism teacher, and William V. Grimes, a philosopher, called "Three Dimensional Objectivity," The Quill, March 1984.

[9] Such "reports" are to be clearly distinguished from news stories to which they give rise; the report is both logically and temporally prior to the news story. Reports themselves can be expressed as propositions about timely events, but could take many different forms, such as a press release, a news bulletin on the radio, a message overheard on the police radio, a wire service news story, a tip from a source, a leaked document, or a news story in a rival newspaper, to mention but some. In the ideal case, the report will be first-hand, eye-witness, experience or knowledge of the events in question by the reporter.

affairs **e**[10] constitutes news, i.e. "**R(e)** is news" or "**R(e)** is newsworthy";

(ii) an evaluation, or synoptic judgment, to the effect that some narrative, or "write-up", **W(e)**, is an appropriate encoding of information associated with **R(e)**, including possible background information and projections; and

(iii) a decision to publish the story **W(e)** in a medium of mass communication.[11]

Sometimes I will use an expanded form of **R(e)** to indicate that news judgments proper are about timely reports that contain statements asserting that **e** obtains, namely, R_t**(that p)**, where R_t refers to a report at time **t**, about the event or state of affairs **e** to the effect **that p**. I will refer to **that p** as the "information content" of the report.

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[10]I will assume, for the purposes of my dissertation, that the notion of "event" is non-problematic, i.e. that the metaphysical issues related to this notion are irrelevant to what I have to say here. By "event" here I simply mean what journalists take to be "current events" in much the same way that historians decide what is to count as a "historical event". The "ontology of events" is beyond the scope of my dissertation. Cf. Eddy M. Zemach, "Events," in Yirmiahu Yovel, ed., Philosophy of History and Action: Papers Present at the First Jerusalem Encounter December 1974, Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1978, pp. 85 - 95.

[11]By "medium of mass communication" here I mean a daily or weekly newspaper, monthly periodical, or regularly-scheduled news broadcast. There are several good introductions to mass media, including journalism, such as Jay Black and Frederick C. Whitney, Introduction to Mass Communication, sec. ed., Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Publishers, 1988; Warren K. Agee, Philip H. Ault and Edwin Emery, Introduction to Mass Communications, Ninth Edition, New York: Harper and Row, 1988, and John R. Bittner, Mass Communication: An Introduction, Fourth Edition, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1986.

For example, a reporter receives a report that the Speaker of the Canadian Senate, Guy Charbonneau, will call a vote on a bill to establish a new Goods and Services Tax, or GST, on Thursday, Dec. 13, 1990, at 5:45 p.m. Here the report [**R(e)**] is the announcement on the timing of the vote on the GST-bill, an issue of ongoing debate in Canadian politics during 1990. The reporter judges that report to be newsworthy, i.e. makes a judgment to the effect that "The announcement of the timing of this vote is newsworthy" ["**R(e)** is news"], and then writes a narrative [**W(e)**], which is subsequently published as follows:

> # Vote called on GST
>
> OTTAWA (CP) -- The final vote on the goods and services tax will be held no later than 5:45 p.m. EST today, the Speaker of the Senate ruled Wednesday.
>
> The ruling by Guy Charbonneau, which would end the Liberals' lengthy filibuster on the GST, threw the Conservative-dominated red chamber into an uproar.
>
> Outraged Liberals called it a total corruption of Parliament.
>
> .....[12]

I am primarily interested in (i), the journalistic news judgment proper. I want to determine what, if any, truth or rationality conditions justify the news judgment proper,

[12]Text from The London Free Press, Dec. 13, 1990, p. 1. Byline on the story is "By Helen Branswell, Canadian Press."

"R(e) is news". Those conditions are distinct from, though not unrelated to, the propositional or information content of the narrative, W(e). More will be said about this later.

The <u>uniqueness</u> of journalistic news judgment proper, and hence its interest as an element of a "practice" in Frankel's sense, arises because such judgments (1) are professionally made by a distinct group of people, journalists; in (2) the context of a "newsday"[13], accessible only to journalists, and (3) explicitly asserted -- and subjected to argument and discussion -- primarily within the practice, i.e. among journalists.[14]

In addition to these professional aspects of journalistic news judgment, such judgments are not explicitly or expressly asserted as part of the propositional content of the news narratives to which they give rise. Instead, such judgments are publicly and implicitly manifested only through the publication of the narrative. In the GST case above, for example, the

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[13] While I will have more to say about this notion of the "newsday" later, it may be helpful, in the interim, to think of it as the set of all reports available to the journalist in a given day.

[14] I will have more to say about the journalists as a group in a moment. The most significant point establishing the uniqueness of journalistic news judgments proper is (2), the context of the newsday, about which more below, p. 110. With respect to (3), note how public admission of error by journalists nearly always concerns matters of fact, not the news judgment proper.

narrative is the story headlined "Vote called on GST" but the judgment that the timing of the vote is newsworthy is not directly asserted within that narrative. It is exemplified or implicitly asserted by the published narrative. It is as if the published narrative says: "GST vote to be held, and this is news."

My philosophical analysis of journalistic news judgment takes this implicit expression of the news judgment proper in the public, published narrative as its starting point; that published narrative is the communicative action journalists perform.[15] My analysis seeks to probe beyond that text to determine what the relevant news judgment proper is, how it relates to that text and to the events the text is about. The problematic nature of this relationship becomes immediately apparent when a news judgment is criticized. In the above example, for instance, to question the truth of the news claim implicit in the publication of the story "Vote called on GST" is not to cast doubt on whether the vote has actually been called, but primarily to ask whether the decision to call for this vote constitutes news or not. It could also be argued that a better way to approach the epistemic issues of journalistic news judgment would be to take as the object of philosophical analysis

[15] The allusions are to Habermas and Austin, and will be made more explicit later in this introduction, and spelled out in detail in the next chapter.

what social science has discovered about the ways in which journalists determine what is, or what is not, news. I have rejected this approach not only because such social science is not without its own philosophical presuppositions but also because doing so would not allow me to deal with the intuitive fact that we believe that the truth of the news, whatever it is, is somehow related to the way the world is.[16]

Importance of subject

Since news is an essential element of most mass communication media, the significance of my subject is a consequence of the role of mass media in our society. McQuail has summarized the major media functions as follows: Mass media are (1) a powerful and growing industry and institution, (2) a means of control in society, (3) an arena for the affairs of public life, (4) a platform where cultural, artistic and lifestyle developments and innovations are put on display, and (5) a dominant source of "images of social reality".[17] I will take it for granted that in the performance of these functions, mass media

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[16] I have more to say on this in Chapter II.

[17] Dennis McQuail. Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction, Second Edition. Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1987, p. 3.

journalism constitutes a significant element of modern life, significant enough to warrant philosophical attention in the manner suggested by Frankel's remarks on the importance of "philosophy of practice".

In addition to this general significance of mass media, the practice of journalism itself represents an experience of life worthy of philosophical reflection. Borrowing from Hyland here, it can be said that the news business represents a "rich" experience for journalists, one worthy to be savoured in reflection.[18]

A still more important reason for philosophical reflection on the journalistic craft arises from the fact that the exercise of this craft constitutes an important, if not essential, element of our democratic system of government and institutional life,[19] an importance duly

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[18]Drew A. Hyland, The Question of Play, New York: University Press of America, 1984. Hyland's work is an attempt to develop a philosophy of competitive sports, something he calls an "excess" experience. I have called journalism a "rich" experience to make the same point, namely, that it deserves philosophical reflection; it is an experience "that demands preservation". (p. xii)

[19]It would take volumes to document this point. One of the most accessible overviews of this topic for modern times is still Fred S. Siebert, Theodore Peterson, and Wilbur Schramm, Four Theories of the Press, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956. The philosophical classic is, of course, John Stuart Mill's classic, On Liberty. That classic should be read in conjunction with Walter Lippmann's critique of same in his Liberty and the News, New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1920, which contains the gist of what later became known as the "social responsibility" theory of the press as advocated by the influential Commission on Freedom of the Press report by William E. Hocking, Freedom of the

recognized in law.[20] As Adam has pointed out, journalists do, as a matter of fact, exercise certain rights and freedoms on behalf of all members of society.[21] Given then that journalists play an important and essential role in our national life, philosophical reflection on their work would appear to be both justified and desirable.

Philosophical Lack of Interest

The question now suggests itself: If the subject matter is so significant, why have philosophers tended to ignore it?[22] I suggest that it might be because journalism may

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Press: A Framework of Principle, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1947.

[20] And, of course, also enshrined in the U.S. and Canadian constitutions, the First Amendment in the U.S. and freedom of the press provision in Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

[21] G. Stuart Adam, "The Charter and the Role of the Media: A Journalist's Perspective," in The Media, The Courts, and the Charter, Philip Anisman and Allen M. Linden, eds. Toronto: Carswell, 1986.

[22] John C. Merril, a journalism professor, and Jack S. Odell, a professional philosopher, claim in the preface of their Philosophy and Journalism, New York and London: Longman, 1983, that "So far as we know, this is the first book which has attempted to deal systematically with journalistic philosophy in its main dimensions...." (p. ix) A more recent effort at philosopher-journalist collaboration can be found in The Virtuous Journalist, New York: Oxford University Press, 1987, by Stephen Klaidman, a journalism teacher, and Tom L. Beauchamp, a philosopher.

have seemed to them to be simply a trade, a craft or a business of little, if any, philosophical interest. After all, plumbing and haberdashery have not provided fertile grounds for philosophical reflection either. It may also be, perhaps, that the philosophical disinterest in journalism can be traced back to the long-standing enmity between the seed of Isocrates and Socrates.[23] At any rate, the fact of the matter is that the followers of Socrates have not shown much interest in the philosophical perils of the journalistic craft.

David Swenson, in his discussion of Kierkegaard's journal notes on the journalism in the Danish press of his day, addresses the charge that a philosopher only demeans himself when considering such a "recognized triviality" as the daily press. Swenson's response is to note that "...a triviality which occupies the major part of the unmortgaged time and attention of millions of men, and which is in fact almost their only mental pabulum, constitutes for this very reason, namely, because it is a triviality which thus engrosses them, a most important matter for the reflection of the ethical thinker."[24]

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[23] As suggested by A. E. Taylor, Plato: The Man and His Work, London and New York: Methuen, 7th edition, 1960, p. 5.

[24] David Swenson, "A Danish Thinker's Estimate of Journalism," Ethics, Vol. 1, No. 1, (1927-28), p. 186. Indeed, he goes further and says: "...if it be true that education is the process of arriving at an understanding of life, then no modern man can be called educated unless he is

Going beyond Swenson's point, I intend to demonstrate that philosophy itself has much to gain by engaging in serious reflection on the business of journalism, the organized pursuit of novelty in the affairs of humankind. Beginning with the next chapter I intend to show that the exercise of journalistic news judgment raises some interesting philosophical puzzles, difficulties that are not without intrinsic interest to current issues in contemporary philosophy.

Thesis statement

My argument in this dissertation is that objective, rational criteria for the exercise of journalistic news judgment proper can be specified and defended. To put the thesis in another way, I intend to show what the scientific study of journalistic practice cannot show,[25] viz., that

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able to read his newspaper between the lines. For this reason, if for no other, it is a vital necessity for every modern thinker to have a theory of the newspaper, and to have a theory of the newspaper which corresponds in its intellectual significance to the significance of his thought in other fields." (p. 191)

[25]Communication science cannot do this because it sees journalists as "knowledge workers" who take information from sources and make it available to an audience. At that level, nothing distinguishes a New York Times journalist from one working for a supermarket tabloid. Cf. James S. Ettema, D. Charles Whitney and Daniel B. Wackman, "Professional Mass Communicators," in Handbook of Communication Science, Charles R. Berger and Steven H. Chaffee, eds., Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications Inc., 1987, pp. 747 - 780.

there is a distinction to be made in the epistemic worth of the news judgments proper that inform the articles in newspapers such as The New York Times and those that prevail in supermarket tabloids such as the National Examiner.[26]

Scope of Thesis

I will take the professional practice of daily newspaper journalism in North America as paradigmatic for the purposes of my analysis.[27] For that reason, the examples of journalistic news judgment will be primarily from daily newspaper journalism. This restriction is motivated by a desire to stick to the mass medium with which I am most familiar, and because North American newspaper journalism is secular and community-based.

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[26]I should like to think of this as the prima facie rationality problem in journalism.

[27] Whether or not journalism constitutes a "genuine" profession is a debatable, and for my purposes, largely irrelevant issue. See Everrette C. Dennis and John C. Merril, Basic Issues in Mass Communication, New York: MacMillan, 1984. David H. Weaver and C. Cleveland Wilhoit, The American Journalist: A Portrait of U.S. News People and Their Work, Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1986, sum up the matter thus: "The modern journalist, then, is of a profession but not in one." (p. 145) There are approximately 55,000 daily newspaper journalists working for some 1,800 North American newspapers. These figures are based on U.S. figures cited in Weaver and Wilhoit, op. cit., p. 13. I have added 6.6%, the ratio of the number of Canadian to U.S. dailies, to their total to include Canadian daily newspaper journalists.

I readily grant that there are other forms of journalism, springing from different historical roots and aiming at different goals. Accordingly, what I will have to say about journalistic news judgment may, or may not, be applicable to these other forms of print journalism, such as that found in magazines, for example, or the more ideologically-oriented or religiously-based press of Europe. I hope and expect, however, that what I will have to say will be of interest to media critics, scholars, historians, and general consumers of that perishable commodity known as the "news of the day."

Having outlined my subject matter and general thesis, I next want to describe my philosophical approach to the problem of determining what criteria of truth or rationality -- if any -- count in the determination that some reports constitute news while others do not. The question I want to address is: Under what conditions is a news judgment proper justified? Or, what makes such judgments valid?

The Turn to Habermas

I want to begin by placing this question of the assertoric validity of journalistic news judgment in the context of Habermas's theory of communicative action. Specifically, the Habermasian analysis will allow me to link the communicative action orientation in journalistic news judgment to rationality theory. Following Habermas, I will argue that the news judgment proper -- while not publicly expressed -- is nevertheless made evident through the illocutionary force of the published news narrative, the "speech act" of journalists.[28] It is Habermas's use of these notions derived from Austin's theory of speech acts (performatives), that allow him to link rationality theory and communicative actions in general. Adapting this analysis, I want to be able to say that the published news narrative, as a communicative action, requires that a journalist be ready to give reasons for:

> (i) the objective or assertoric validity of the implicit news judgment proper, the claim that the report on which the narrative is based is newsworthy;
>
> (ii) the normative validity claim that the narrative is "appropriate", and
>
> (iii) the subjective validity claim that the utterance is "sincere" or "truthful".

My primary interest, again, is to elucidate the validity conditions for the news judgment proper, but I will also briefly discuss (ii) and (iii) in the concluding chapter.

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[28]It may be helpful to distinguish Habermas's concept of communicative action from mere "acts of communication". The latter, according to Habermas, are "operations", physical movements, through which an agent performs an action. He notes that "Operations do not have to do with the world." (Habermas, I, p. 98) "Acts of communication" are "operations" within the context of communicative action, in the same way that arm movement, for example, is an "operation" in the gymnastic exercise that is carried out by means of it. (Ibid., p. 97)

While the richness of the Habermasian approach will become evident as my argument develops, it may be helpful to indicate its immediate relevance here. For example, it could be argued that I am inventing philosophical labors where none are needed because it seems plain that the objective or assertoric validity of the news judgment proper is simply a function of the truth of the news narrative. If the news story is true, so the argument would go, the news judgment is valid, and all this talk about "assertoric validity" of a "news judgment proper" that is somehow hidden within the news narrative is just obfuscating the "real validity condition" of journalism, namely that journalists should stick to reporting facts, not fictions. Attractive as this argument seems, I will demonstrate in the next chapter that it cannot be maintained. The problem of the validity of journalistic news judgments proper requires a more sophisticated analysis than a naive appeal to factual truth, however important the latter may be. Habermas's theory of the rationality of communicative action provides such a framework.

Furthermore, the Habermasian context also permits me to make allowances for the undisputed fact that newspaper publishing in North America is driven by the profit-motive as well as certain commitments to public service. Indeed, the Habermasian analysis allows me to confront as part of the overall rationality problem in journalism the profound difficulty that this dual function of commercialized mass media poses for journalists seeking to maintain their professional autonomy in its industrial context.

With respect to my thesis, for example, it could be objected that the "rationality problem" I perceive in the different news judgments of a New York Times and Examiner is readily explained in terms of the respective markets served by these publications. Hence, so the objection would go, the "real-world" rationality of journalism is a question for economics, not philosophy. To deal with this objection, I need a rationality theory broad enough to encompass both the demands of Truth and Success. And again, Habermas's rationality theory supplies such a context by providing (a) a conceptual framework encompassing a variety of validity claims *in* communicative action, and (b) a distinction between "rationality structures" enabling the demarcation of the journalistic interest in truth from corporate interests in profits or power.[29]

While Habermas himself does not address the problem of journalistic news judgment, he does suggest the relevance of his work to my topic by noting that mass communications

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[29]These "rationality structures" are "lifeworld" and "system". For an excellent summary of Habermas's theory see Thomas McCarthy's "Translator's Introduction," in Volume I of the The Theory of Communicative Action. The first two chapters of Stephen K. White, The Recent Work of Jürgen Habermas: Reason, justice & modernity, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, were also helpful.

constitutes a generalized form of communicative action, with ambiguous systemic or success-oriented connections, in which journalists play an important part.[30] By classifying mass media journalism as a generalized form of communication,[31] Habermas wants to emphasize the use made of influence and value commitment in such communication.[32] This influence and value commitment -- "power of the press" in the present context -- enable generalized forms of communication to exert a certain kind of "pressure" to achieve consensus on certain validity claims. Through their de facto influence and value commitments, mass media journalists "simplify"[33] the full process of communicative action to achieve

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[30]Habermas tells us that he worked for four years, without interruption, on his Theory of Communicative Action. Its scope can be described in several ways. It can be seen as a critical theory of society that seeks to save the heritage of the Enlightenment. It could also be viewed as the blueprint for a new research program for social science, and as a philosophical-sociological theory of rationality.

[31]Habermas, II, p. 391. The suggestion comes in the concluding section of his work, in which he probes, by way of conjecture, the potential research program suggested by his analysis of communicative rationality. Cf. Leach's view that rationality theory is the underlying research program for social science. (J. J. Leach, "The Dual Function of Rationality," Foundational Problems in the Special Sciences, Robert E. Butts and Jaakko Hintikka, eds., Dordrecht: Reidel, 1977.)

[32]Science and scholarship, for example, are cited as somewhat similar "institutions", using influence and value commitment to exercise "prestige orderings and moral leadership" in society.

[33]Habermas, II, p. 277.

consensus or agreement. The simplification is achieved, in Habermas's terms, "through abstraction from lifeworld complexity,"[34] a notion we are not yet in a position fully to appreciate but which has an unmistakably intuitive ring to it when we think of journalistic "simplifications" of complex issues.

Rather than provide an abstract overview here of the technical concepts in Habermas's theory -- concepts such as lifeworld, validity claims, system, and rationality structures -- I will introduce and explain such features of Habermas's theory as the need arises. The main point for now is to note the appropriateness of the Habermasian approach for my topic given (i) the indirect -- illocutionary way --in which the objective validity claim of a news judgment proper is made, namely through something (ii) that is a social, communicative action: the publication of a news story in a newspaper.

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[34] Ibid.

CHAPTER I

The Philosophical Problem of News Judgment

The purpose of this chapter is to identify what I consider to be <u>the</u> philosophical problem of journalistic news judgments proper. I also argue that a philosophical critique of the logic or rationality of such judgments becomes feasible when such judgments are construed as validity claims associated with the illocutionary force of published news narratives.

The philosophical problem is that neither the truth of reports[1] judged to be newsworthy nor the truth of news

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[1]It is important to recall that the notion of "report" here refers to whatever report a journalist takes as the starting point of a particular "newsmaking" process. Such reports, as indicated in the previous chapter, could include press releases, published news narratives, wire service reports, a phone call from an informant, a radio dispatch, a hotel register, etc. It could be virtually any piece of information about some timely state of affairs or event at all. "Reports" in this somewhat technical sense here are to be distinguished from what we also, ordinarily, can call news reports, namely, the finished product of the journalist's newsmaking. I refer to the latter kind of reports as narratives, stories, or write-ups, **W(e)**.

narratives based on such judgments suffice to account for the 'truth' or 'validity' of news judgments. There is something more to the validity of news judgments than truth.[2] I will also try to show that the latter, this "something more", pertains to an objective or assertoric "validity claim" made when a news narrative is published, i.e. when the news narrative is construed as a "speech act" or "communicative action." This latter argument picks up on some of the ideas from Austin and Habermas mentioned in the Introduction.

My first set of arguments will try to demonstrate that it is possible to have intuitively valid news judgments, based on false reports, and intuitively invalid ones based on true reports. Similarly, I will show that it is possible to have true narratives, based on invalid news judgments, and false narratives, based on valid news judgments. The conclusion is that truth (or falsehood) is neither a

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[2]I want to acknowledge here that it could be argued that the "something more" of the truth in a news judgment proper is that such judgments refer to certain especially important or interesting states of affairs. That is, news judgments proper pick out events that have certain objective, newsworthy characteristics. This "ideology of objectivity" is, in fact, what many journalists affirm and what they appeal to when justifying their conventions, the "rules" of their craft. I will return to this ideology in a later chapter. For now, however, it should be obvious that the suggestion that the "something more" than truth in news judgments proper consists of the "special nature" of that truth in effect grants the point to be made, namely, that there is more to the validity of such news judgments than the facticity of the reports they are about; not just any fact will do.

necessary nor a sufficient condition for the validity (or invalidity) of such judgments. In presenting various examples and arguments based on them, I will distinguish between the <u>actuality</u> of a report -- and by "actuality of a report" here I simply mean that the report was a "real report", not an imagined one -- and the <u>reality</u> reported, its information content.

Consider a report that the town hall is on fire. Imagine it is a report a reporter hears on the police radio. The reporter tells the editor, "The police say that there is a fire at the town hall."[3] The reporter then grabs a camera or alerts a photographer and sets off to investigate. The news judgment proper, "'The poli report that the town hall is on fire' [**R(e)**] is newsworthy", was made and appropriate action taken. The editor, shortly thereafter, turns the radio to the fire department frequency and discovers that the fire report was based on a false alarm. The editor determines that the initial news judgment is no longer valid and and recalls the reporter and photographer. The editor's news judgment about the fire department report [**R'(e)**] is that this later and more authoritative report has invalidated the original police report.

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[3]In expanded form, this would be the report, $\mathbf{R}_t$**(that p)**, where $\mathbf{R}_t$ is the police radio report, just now, to the effect **that p**, i.e. that the town hall is on fire.

What this example shows is that both news judgments, at the time they were made, are 'valid', valid here in the sense of intuitively legitimate, or appropriate, *even though they cancel each other*.[4] What this example also shows is that the validity of these judgments, at the time they were made, is unaffected by what is actually going on at the town hall, the state of affairs the reports are about. It seems to be the case that what counts here first of all is what I have called the *actuality* of the report, not the *reality* of what is being reported. Obviously, however, the reality or unreality of the fire has *some* bearing on the validity of the news judgment proper, viz., no fire, no news. But when we try to spell out just how this "obvious" something -- reality -- is related to the news judgment proper, it is far from clear just what that connection is.

To underline the difficulty of the problem, note how it is relatively clear that what counts as *evidence* for believing that there is a fire at the town hall, the *reality* in question, e.g. seeing the flames, smoke etc. is not thereby evidence for the judgment that the occurrence of this fire constitutes news. There is *no* contradiction in claiming, "I know the town hall fire occurred, but I don't

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[4]I am assuming here that the reader will grant the intuitive 'validity' here, i.e. grant that both the reporter and the editor interpreted the information they received appropriately. We have, of course, as yet no clear idea as to the what or why of this validity.

believe that is news." Knowing that something is the case and knowing that something is news are two different things; the former implies the truth of what is known, the latter does not imply that what is known to be newsworthy did, in fact, take place. Or, again, evidence that justifies a knowledge claim about some state of affairs does not thereby also justify a news judgment proper with respect to that state of affairs.

News and Reality

To make the point that these questions pertain to rationality considerations other than the propositional truth of the report -- the actuality of a timely report by a source that some state of affairs obtains -- consider this example, a type of 'news' commonly found in tabloids:

Shipwrecked sailor saved by mermaids

MIAMI, Fl. -- A shipwrecked sailor, found on a private beach 20 miles north of here claims to have been brought safely to shore by a school of mermaids.

"They sang to keep me awake," said John F. Scott, 29, of Tampa, the sole survivor of the crew of a 43-foot cabin cruiser which sank in a storm four days earlier.

> "When I tired of swimming," Scott added, "the mermaids took turns keeping me afloat.
>
> "I did not know what they were singing. It wasn't English, but it sure sounded sweet," he said.

If we assume that Scott made the statement attributed to him, we can claim to have a 'true' (actuality) report here, as well as a 'true' narrative since **W(e)** above is an accurate write-up of **R(e)**. But to what extent is it "rational" here to judge Scott's report to be newsworthy? I think it should be obvious that whatever the validity of a news judgment proper may be, such validity simply cannot be equated with the actuality of the report judged to be newsworthy.

This assymetry between the validity of a news judgment proper and the truth of the reality reported to obtain is immediately evident when the expanded form of **R(e)** is used to bring out the fact that such reports are indirect propositions of the general form "A said (just now) **that p**" or "**That p**, A said (just now)". In the above case, that exapnded form would look like this: "'Scott's report ($\mathbf{R_t}$) that he was rescued by mermaids (**that p**)' is newsworthy."

Thus construed, it is evident that the <u>actuality</u> of a report -- Scott really did say that he was rescued by mermaids -- is quite unrelated to the <u>reality</u> (truth or falsity) of the thing reported. To determine the actuality of a report, we need merely to look at a clock as we take note of what is being said;[5] to determine the reality of a state of affairs, we need to look at the way the world is. Is there anything about the actuality of reports, other than their timeliness, that counts in the determination of the validity of news judgments based on them? What is it about such reports that makes news judgments based on them valid or invalid? What role does evidence play in such judgments? How is the source of reports related to the validity of news judgments based on them? Those are but some of the questions that would appear to be relevant to the issue of the validity of a news judgment proper.

Given the actuality of reports, i.e. the truth of **R_t(that p)**,[6] there are, logically, eight possible ways in which the validity of news judgment proper, the truth of the information content of reports and associated news

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[5]Putting it that way oversimplifies the matter, since there is clearly more to authenticating a report than looking at a clock. But the point, of course, is that it is one thing to establish the "reality" or "authenticity" or "actuality" of a report; quite another to establish the truth or falsity of what is being reported.

[6]It could be argued here that there are fictitious, or fraudulent, or propagandistic reports, which are not-actual. I do not see, however, what the addition of an additional eight logically possible cases of valid and invalid news judgments based on not-actual reports would add here. I would be inclined to argue that news judgments based on reports known to be fictitious, fraudulent etc. are, ipso facto, invalid.

Examples	News-judgment	Report content	News Story
Case A	Valid	True	True
Case B	Valid	True	False
Case C	Valid	False	True
Case D	Valid	False	False
Case E	Invalid	True	True
Case F	Invalid	True	False
Case G	Invalid	False	True
Case H	Invalid	False	False

Table I: Relationships between validity of news judgment, the information content of reports judged to be newsworthy, and the truth of propositions in news narratives.

narratives may be related, as shown in Table 1, above. Not all of them are equally interesting or pertinent to my case, but I will consider an example for each of the cases listed.

What Table I shows, in full generality, is the point at issue, namely that neither the truth of a report's information content nor the truth of a narrative is a necessary or sufficient condition for the validity of a news judgment proper. The actuality of reports, of course, is such a necessary condition for without them there can be no news judgments proper. As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, I take this problematic relationship between the validity of a journalistic news judgment proper and the truth of the information content reported or truth of narrative propositions based on such judgments to constitute

<u>the</u> philosophical problem of journalism. The philosophical question is: If not truth, what else can there be to account for the validity of such judgments? I will return to this question after discussing each one of the cases listed.

Case A: Most news stories, in reputable papers, are instances of Case A, i.e. they reflect valid news judgments about real events, truly reported and narrated.

Case B: Here is an example of a valid news judgment, about a real state of affairs, the Ontario provincial election outcome of 1990, erroneously narrated:

Socialist party wins election in Ontario

TORONTO, Ont. (Staff) -- The New Socialist Party (NSP) won the Ontario election last night by winning 76 of the seats in the provincial legislature.

Ed Broadbent, the leader of the NSP, said the results showed that the people of Ontario were fed up with the Liberals.

Mike Peterson's Liberals, the previous party in power, won 38 seats, while David Harris's Tories won 20 seats.

There are 134 seats in the Ontario legislature.[7]

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[7] While no such article appeared anywhere as far as I know, it is not too difficult to imagine a news story such as this in some U.S. newspaper. For the record, the facts are that the name of the party is the New Democratic Party, and it won 74 seats. Its leader is Bob Rae. The Liberal leader who lost is David Peterson, and the Tory leader is Mike Harris. The Liberals won 36 seats, the Tories, 20. The total number of seats in the legislature is 130.

Case C: This is the case of a valid news judgment about an unreal event, truly narrated. An example could be a story about the false fire alarm at the town hall. Normally, of course, such "stories" would not be written at all, but that is not particularly important here. The interesting, and relevant point is, as noted above, that a valid news judgment proper may be about a report referring to a non-existent state of affairs.

Case D: In cases of this type both the source of a report and the journalist reporting it commit errors of fact. Again, this is not a particularly interesting case for our purposes, given that it has been granted that valid news judgments may be made on the basis of reports that are factually mistaken.

Case E: This is the first of the invalid news judgments, a true story about a real state of affairs or event. Examples would be true accounts of "old news" or trivia, i.e. reports about states of affairs that are common knowledge. Another example would be this account of the outcome of the Ontario provincial election of 1990, which is true enough but misses the point of the election outcome:

Grits, Tories take majority in Ontario vote

TORONTO, Ont. (Staff) -- Ontario's Liberal and Conservative parties won 62 per cent of the popular vote in yesterday's provincial election.

Bob Rae's New Democratic Party, devoted to socialist principles, won only 38 per cent of the popular vote.

While Liberal leader David Peterson lost his own seat to an NDP candidate, he said that "There is no disgrace is getting knocked down. There is only disgrace in not getting up."

Mike Harris, the leader of the Progressive Conservative party defeated his NDP rival and said he was "proud of this campaign. We put the tax issue on the top of everyone's agenda."

There are 130 seats in the Ontario legislature and the number of seats held by any one party depends on, but is not determined by the popular vote.

Case F: Examples of this category are like the previous one, except that factual errors are included in the accounts.

Case G: The mermaid example, above, would seem to be a logical candidate for this category: invalid news judgments about something that is not so, truly narrated. However, since it turns out that the rationality question in journalism ultimately hinges on whether or not the mermaid case should be construed as an instance of type C or G, I include it here only as a suggestion. The possible argument that the mermaid example is an instance of type C is precisely the argument that I would like to be able to refute.

A more appropriate example of Case G, then, could be a news judgment based on a naive or self-serving and uncritical acceptance of a false or misleading report from a source, e.g. public relations firm, political party hack, though the narrative itself is a 'true' account. The invalidity results from taking some report at face value when the journalist should have known better.

Case H: Instances of this type are called "hoaxes," one of the most famous of which, in recent years, was Janet Cooke's Pulitzer Prize story of Jimmy, an alleged eight-year-old heroin addict.[8]

These examples, or examples like them, show, I think, that the truth or reality of the information content of a report would appear to be irrelevant, i.e. neither necessary nor sufficient, for the validity of a news judgment proper. At first glance, this conclusion seems so clearly counterintuitive that it suggests there is something wrong with my argument. After all, as already noted previously, we buy newspapers to find out what is going on in the world. Are we deluded in thinking this?

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[8]The hoax was discovered, much to the embarrasment of the Washington Post, which returned the Pulitzer Prize and fired Cooke. One of the earliest, and most famous, hoaxes in newspaper history was perpretated by a grandson of the philosopher, John Locke, who worked as a reporter for the New York Sun in the 1830s. His account, known as the "Moon hoax", of fictitious discoveries on the moon, was reprinted by many other papers. The hoax consisted of a series of articles on lunar flora, fauna and humanoid life.

The answer to this question is that we are not deluded because the news <u>stories</u> journalists publish and the ones that we read consist of factual statements that refer -- even if indirectly -- to states of affairs in the world, and are in that sense <u>about</u> the world. Hence, the <u>news value</u> of such stories is clearly tied up with their truth. But my arguments and examples above dealt with the validity or invalidity of the <u>explicitly-expressed</u> news judgments proper, <u>not</u> the news narratives.[9] My present concern is to account for the rationality of the news judgments on which such narratives are based. As I already indicated in the Introduction, however, news judgments proper are not even part of news narratives. Hence, their truth or falsity -- or validity -- cannot be captured by the factuality of the story. So the objection about the counter-intuitive result of my analysis of the notion of news judgment proper misses the mark. It is not a question of being deluded by news narratives; it is a question of the validity of the news judgments leading to such news narratives which, as a matter

[9]That is, I was concerned to explicate the articulated form such judgments take when journalists discuss or argue about news values of reported events among themselves, or which critics of the press may formulate in explicit terms in disputes with editors. I expressed this explicit nature of the news judgment proper as "'R_t(that p)' is newsworthy." [Notice, incidentally, how journalistic admissions of error invariably concern matters of fact that they got wrong. Seldom -- I am aware of no contrary case at all -- do journalists admit to errors of <u>judgment</u> with respect to the news value of events reported as news.]

of fact, we do read and often believe, as timely accounts of important and interesting events that go on in our world.

The useful aspect of the objector's point, which I grant, is to the effect that the worth of news narratives is most certainly dependent on their truth. It is that aspect of news narratives, in fact, which allows me to make another point, against a different, more general objection.

That objection is that since news judgments proper are explicit in the context of the newsroom or criticism, the rationality of such judgments is best considered within the context of their utterance in the newsroom. It could be argued, for example, that one would do well to study how a word or concept is "used" before attempting to define it or giving an account of its "meaning" or "validity". What could be more appropriate in the present context, the suggestion would go, but to study and reflect philosophically on how journalists actually use the word/concept "news" and "newsworthy"? In addition, so this line of reasoning could go on, there is a considerable body of data here, gathered by social scientists studying the newsgathering and news disseminating practices of journalists, evidence that could serve as the basis of such a philosophical study.

In addition to the reasons given in the Introduction for rejecting this suggestion, I can now give a further, and in my view, definitive reason for not following such a course. That reason is that the news judgment proper, when it is made explicit, directly refers to reports, and only indirectly to the way the world is. As such, an analysis at that level would be hard put to take seriously these very intuitions about news that both journalists and readers share, namely, that news has to do with what is going on in the world. Accordingly, a philosophical analysis of the way in which journalists make their news judgments proper explicit or defend their judgments of newsworthiness would lead, at best, to an inventory of conventions -- i.e. professionally-accepted rules for newsmaking. It is difficult to see how philosophy could give an account of the rationality of those conventions without either positing some _a priori_ notion of what news _really is_, or some uncritical acceptance of some vision or ideal of the function of the journalistic craft.

Either strategy would appear to be unacceptable. At best, the suggested approaches could produce a philosophy _for_ journalism, e.g. one based on some ideals of human excellence; or a philosophy _about_ journalism, i.e. one that weighed the merits of their conventions, for example, against the methods of social science, or scholarship. But such "edification" or "criticism" is not what a philosophy _of_ journalism has to offer. The latter takes journalism for what it is and is content to analyze the basic _concepts_ to clarify what it finds puzzling about them and seeks to account for their logical and epistemic worth.

For my purposes, the philosophically-relevant, and interesting point of access for the study of journalistic news judgments proper is the public, published texts of the news narratives such judgments inspire. Such narratives are, indeed, couched in terms of sentences and statements that refer directly or indirectly to alleged events or states of affairs in the world and, as such, are either true or false. For this strategy to work, however, it is necessary to show that there is a useful way to speak of "news judgments proper" in news narratives, even though such judgments are not explicitly expressed or stated within such narratives. To do this, I return to a consideration of journalistic news judgment in the context of Habermas's theory of communicative action.

Illocutionary Force

In publishing a news narrative in a medium of mass communication, the propositional content of such narratives is presented as both true and newsworthy. If we think of this published news narrative as the peculiar "speech act" of journalists, their "public utterance", certain Austinian notions associated with speech acts become relevant and helpful.

Austin's work grew out of an attempt to explicate and distinguish the notion of "performatives," statements or speech acts by which something is done, as well as said[10], from "constatives" or statements which are simply true or false. Performatives, so Austin noted, (a) do not describe or report anything, i.e. are not true or false; and (b) uttering the statement is, or is part of, an action which goes beyond merely saying something.[11] In exploring the grammatical and logical character of performatives,[12],

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[10]The main work here is J. L. Austin, How To Do Things With Words, sec. ed., J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà, eds. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975.

[11]Austin, op.cit., p. 5. While Austin did not consider journalistic reporting as such, his own examples of performatives include such statements as would be uttered by someone getting married, "I do take...as my wife," or someone naming a ship, "I name this ship...." when breaking the bottle against the bow, or "I bequeath..." when uttered in a will. Other such performatives include betting and promising. In general, Austin was trying to explicate utterances in which saying something is also "to do something; in which by saying or in saying something we are doing something." (Ibid., p. 12) Clearly, however, what has been said about journalistic news judgments proper so far suggests that such judgments too exhibit the characteristics (a) and (b) as noted.

[12]The attempt to define performatives as a hard and fast logical or distinct grammatical category fails to materialize because it turns out that performatives have a definite relationship to facts, and constatives can be uttered in ways that make them "happy" or "unhappy" in just the same way as performatives. This aspect of Austin's theory need not concern us here. In the end, Austin suggests that the distintion between performatives and constatives is ultimately historical in character, and that the "real conclusion" or insight into language use is provided by his distinction of locutionary and illocutionary acts. (Ibid., p. 146.)

Austin distinguishes what he considers to be more primitive, or basic speech acts. These are the _locutionary_, _illocutionary_ and _perlocutionary_ acts that may be distinguished in any utterance. Each of these various acts associated with a verbal utterance can be characterized as a distinct "doing" or "action".

The _locutionary_ act is the name for three separate actions, making a sound, or noise (the phonetic act), in a certain language (the phatic act) having a definite sense and reference (the rhetic act). The _illocutionary_ act refers to the _way in which the locutionary act is used_. It is the "force" of the locutionary act, something that Austin distinguishes from the _achieved or intended consequences_ of the speech act, or _perlocutionary_ force of such acts.[13]

Consider the following example, the statement, or speech act when audibly pronounced: "I hereby warn you that the roof is about to fall." The locutionary act is the utterance of this sentence in English in circumstances that make clear who and what is being referred to. The illocutionary force of this speech act would be to issue a

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[13]Austin himself neatly sums up these various senses "in which to say something is to do something. Thus we distinguished the locutionary act (and within it the phonetic, the phatic, and rhetic acts) which has a _meaning_; the illocutionary act which has a certain _force_ in saying something; the perlocutionary act which is _the achieving of_ certain _effects_ by saying something." (_Ibid._, p. 121)

warning, and its perlocutionary force or intent might be that the hearer take precautionary measures, get out of the house, or even to sell hearer a new roof.[14] By a rough, but still telling analogy, we can think of the published news story -- ink on paper, in the English language, referring to some state of affairs or events -- as the locutionary act; its explicit illocutionary force is to alert and inform the reader about changes, or what is new, in the world; while it perlocutionary aim could be to teach, or to persuade, or cause to believe, or simply to get the reader to buy the piece of paper. But before we can see what this analogy, or Austin's notions in general, get us, we need to probe a little further.

Austin makes a point of distinguishing between the effects an utterance must have to be "happy", i.e. have the appropriate illocutionary force, and the effects it may produce as a result of its perlocutionary aims. I am primarlily interested in the former, for those lead directly to the context of <u>communication</u>. Austin does not use that

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[14]Just exactly what the perlocutionary force or effect of this utterance might have would depend on circumstances of the speech act, the identity of the speaker, and perhaps other factors, such as an approaching tornado. I have assumed that there will be no disagreement with Austin's general point that the circumstances and identity of the speaker are among the general criteria of appropriateness for both performatives and illocutionary forces. E.g. a person not authorized to christen a particular ship, does not christen it, even though that person utters the right words and goes through the appropriate motions. I am, of course, particularly concerned with the journalism context.

word; he uses the phrase "uptake" instead, by which he means that the hearer "hears what I say and takes what I say in a certain sense. An effect must be achieved...if the illocutionary act is to be carried out....Generally **the effect amounts to bringing about the understanding of the meaning and of the force of the locution.** So the performance of an illocutionary act involves the securing of uptake."[15] This reference to the "effect" of "bringing about the understanding" suggests the importance of the context of communication in any determination of the rationality of a speech act. It is a recognition Austin himself does not fully exploit, though he was clearly aware of its importance;[16] Habermas, however, builds his theory of communicative rationality on that insight. I propose to carry it still further by applying it to contexts of mass communication.

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[15]Austin, op.cit., pp. 116-17. [Boldface mine.] That is, I did not actually warn my neighbour about his roof if he did not hear me or failed to understand what I said. Austin discusses other "effects" an utterance must have if it is to be "happy", i.e. enjoy illocutionary success. Those need not detain us here. This notion of "securing uptake", on the other hand, is crucially important, for it makes it explicit that before an utterance can have its proper illocutionary force there must be communication.

[16]Traditionally, of course, logic as the test of the rationality of statements, abstracts from the "speech situation." Austin was clearly aware that "what we have to study is not the sentence but the issuing of an utterance in a speech situation...." (Ibid., p. 139) However, for a full appreciation of Austin's insights here I can do no better than to refer, and defer, to Habermas's extension of Austin's theory.

For my purposes, the significance of this insight into the importance of "securing uptake" or communication is that (a) it underlines once again the appropriateness of taking the public, communicative action of journalists -- the publication of news narratives -- as the starting point of my analysis of journalistic rationality, and (b) it suggests that the explicit illocutionary force[17] of this communicative action or public speech act is the proclamation of the news value (whatever that is) of the narrative. First, we discern the shouting in the marketplace; then we pay attention to what is said. Thus, the explicit illocutionary force of publishing a news narrative is: This **W(e)** IS NEWS!

This rudimentary application of Austin's theory now suggests that it is this explicit illocutionary force of the published news narrative that expresses, implicitly, the

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[17]Austin distinguishes between "explicit" and "primary" performatives, a distinction that is carried over to his consideration of illocutionary forces, although he does not say much about them. Austin's general distinction is based on historical considerations; he suggests that explicit performatives are a later development in the evolution of language, and the utterance of explicit performatives may include primary ones. His example is to note how "'I will...' is earlier than 'I promise that I will....'" (Austin, op. cit., p. 71) The important point here, for my account, is that Austin clearly allows for one performative to be imbedded or nested in another. I will wish to claim that, given the indirect nature of most news narrative discourse, there is a primary illocutionary act as well as an explicit one; the explicit one declares the news judgment proper; the primary one points to what is being asserted, or the way the world is.

news judgment proper, to wit, that the reported state of affairs is news.[18] In other words, it is the illocutionary force of the utterance, i.e. publication, of news narratives that asserts the news judgment proper.[19] It could also be said that it is through this explicit illocutionary force of the utterance in a medium of mass communication that the news judgment proper can be said to be expressed by the narrative and in that sense in it.[20]

Notice, however, that this explicit illocutionary force pertains to the published narrative as a whole. The realization of this illocutionary "happiness" -- that the narrative is indeed understood as a news story -- will

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[18]In many cases, headlines capture this illocutionary force and articulate the "use" of narrative about a reported event judged to be news. Headlines, of course, are not a part of the news narrative itself, and are usually written by someone other than the writer of the narrative.

[19]Notice how journalists "get us to" see this primary illocutionary force of their utterances by additional means, e.g. the use of "screaming headlines" and other conventions. Cf. Austin, op.cit., pp. 117ff., where Austin discusses ways in which additional means may be used to secure the appropriate illocutionary effects, as distinct from whatever perlocutionary effects an utterance may also seek to attain.

[20]While this way of thinking about the matter was first suggested by a reading of Habermas, it is clear that it is at least consistent with Austin's arguments in How To Do Things With Words (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965). In Lecture XI, p. 133, Austin holds that asserting is just as much an illocutionary act as promising, marrying, etc., i.e. that there is nothing that excludes assertives as performative verbs and that, as such, they are subject to all the "infelicities."

depend on conventions.[21] In the present case those are the conventions of newsmaking, about which more will be said in the next chapter. The important point is that we can discern a <u>primary</u> illocutionary force as well as an <u>explicit</u> one in the published news narrative. The explicit illocutionary act proclaims the news value of the story; the primary illocutionary act is to draw attention to <u>what</u> is being said, i.e. the way the world is.

Similary, in the case of the utterance "I warn you that the roof is about to fall down", the explicit illocutionary force of that utterance is the warning issued. To achieve that result, the utterance is governed by conventions appropriate to issuing warnings, e.g. a serious tone of voice, a sense of urgency in the expression, appropriate gestures, etc., as well as the use of the explicit language, "I warn you that...." However, we could also discern a primary illocutionary act here, a "pointing to" or "assertion" that the roof is in poor repair, or that the approaching tornado is about to smash into the building, i.e. the warning refers to what is going on in the world.

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[21]"We must notice that the illocutionary act is a conventional act: an act done as conforming to a convention." Austin, <u>op.cit.</u>, p. 105. Or again, "Strictly speaking, there cannot be an illocutionary act unless the means employed are conventional...." Austin, <u>op.cit.</u>, p. 119. More will be said about the conventions of journalistic news judgments in the next chapter.

Given these Austinian notions, I now turn to Habermas's theory of communicative action and his rationality theory to develop the framework for analyzing the validity of news judgments proper. Indeed, it is Habermas's use of Austin's distinctions in a theory of argumentation that make his philosophy of communicative action particularly useful for my purposes. In brief, communicative action, for Habermas, is that discursive practice among actors "...oriented to achieving, sustaining, and renewing consensus -- and indeed a consensus that rests on the intersubjective recognition of criticizable validity claims. The rationality inherent in this practice is seen in the fact that a communicatively achieved agreement must be based <u>in the end</u> on reasons. And the rationality of those who participate in this communicative practice is determined by whether, if necessary, they could, <u>under suitable circumstances</u>, provide reasons for their expressions."[22]

Three Validity Claims

Habermas agrees with those writers who have held that the traditional deductive and inductive logical approaches are insufficient as a theory of argumentation or rationality

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[22]Habermas, I, p. 17.

in its broadest sense.[23] "The logic of argumentation," he notes, "does not refer to deductive connections between semantic units (sentences) as does formal logic, <u>but to nondeductive relations between the pragmatic units (speech acts) of which arguments are composed</u>."[24] Habermas is not rejecting logic, of course, but drawing attention to the dynamics of communicative action contexts. In such contexts, as construed by Habermas, speakers offer to redeem -- by giving grounds or reasons -- whatever validity claims they advance through the illocutionary force of their speech acts.

Habermas argues that participants in situations of communicative action make <u>three</u> distinct validity claims through the illocutionary force of their utterances, each one of which may be challenged by the person to whom the speech act is addressed. It would require a major, and unnecessary, exegetical exercise to present Habermas's theory in full. For the sake of my argument, it will be sufficient to demonstrate its plausibility by an example. Let us take the example to be a simple, declarative utterance, "It is raining here now" in the context of the "situation" of a discussion of whether or not to go fishing.

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[23]The theory of argumentation, he claims, "is still in its beginnings." Habermas, I, p. 22.

[24]Habermas, I, p. 22. [My itals]

As a locutionary act, the proposition "It is raining here now" affirms the existence of a state of affairs, to wit, rain here now. Let us put the example into context, with A, B, and C as actors in this little scene of "communicative action":

> A:"Let's go fishing."
> B: "It is raining here now."
> C: "I don't see any rain."
> B: "That's because you're looking at the wall. Look out the window and you will see that it is raining here now."
> A: "So, what? If it rains, we'll get wet that's all."
> B: "But if you get wet, you'll catch a cold. And you will get wet, because it is raining here now."
> C: "You're just saying that it is raining here now because you don't want to go fishing."
> B: "No, I always like to go fishing, but not when it is raining here now. And it is."

In this situation, B defends his "speech act" on three fronts: as (i) an objective truth about the world, or constative validity claim; as (ii) normatively appropriate, by pointing out the undesirable consequences, an evaluation; and (iii) as a sincere statement of his beliefs. He "redeemed" the implicit validity claims by offering "reasons" as follows: for (i) he offered evidence, "Look for yourself and see that it is, in fact, raining"; for (ii) he pointed to undesirable consequences, sickness, as well as the "norm" causally relating getting wet with getting sick;

for (iii) he referred to his genuine love for fishing, except when it is raining.

In general, so Habermas maintains, in contexts of communicative action, the illocutionary force of a speaker's utterance always raises these three types of validity claims with respect to the objective, normative and subjective "worlds" to which such speech acts can be taken to refer.[25] A participant in such contexts of communicative action must be ready to "redeem" each one of those validity claims, although it is usually the case that only one of the three is the <u>explicit</u> validity claim. In contexts of communicative action, a hearer can question -- i.e. demand "redemption" through reasons -- not only the objective or constative claim, but also its normative appropriateness and subjective sincerity. Habermas thus claims that a speaker, oriented to reaching understanding, "must raise at least three validity claims with each utterance, namely:

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[25]In considering validity claims, Habermas uses the expression "three worlds" or "world relations" by which he means that a speaker, through the illocutionary force of the utterance, makes validity claims for the objective, normative and subjective worlds. "Communicative action relies on a cooperative process of interpretation in which participants relate simultaneously to something in the objective, the social, and the subjective worlds, even when they <u>thematically stress only one</u> of the three components in their utterances....Thus, it is a rule of communicative action that when a hearer assents to a thematized validity claim, he acknowledges the other two implicitly raised validity claims as well -- otherwise, he is supposed to make known his dissent." (Habermas, II, pp. 120-21)

1. That the statement made is true (or that the existential presuppositions of the propositional content mentioned are in fact satisfied);

2. That the speech act is right with respect to the existing normative context (or that the normative context that it is supposed to satisfy is itself legitimate); and

3. That the manifest intention of the speaker is meant as it is expressed."[26]

This admittedly cursory and truncated, but I trust suggestive, presentation of Habermas's notion of validity claims in communicative action, can be applied to contexts of journalistic news judgment with two qualifications. The first of these consists of an argument that the explicit illocutionary force of a news narrative makes an objective, or constative, claim about the information content of the report judged to be newsworthy. The second qualification is

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[26] Habermas, I, p. 99. An utterance does not make the three validity claims in the same way; one of the three is primary, and will be indicated by the illocutionary mode. Cf. also, I, pp. 308-309: "...the illocutionary role...determines the aspect of validity under which the speaker wants his utterance to be understood <u>first and foremost</u>. When he makes a statement, asserts, narrates, explains, represents, predicts, discusses something, or the like, he is looking for an agreement with the hearer based on the recognition of a truth claim. When the speaker utters a first-person experiential sentence, discloses, reveals, confesses, manifests something, or the like, agreement can come about only on the basis of the recognition of a claim to truthfulness or sincerity. When the speaker gives an order or makes a promise, appoints or warns somebody, baptizes or weds someone, buys something, or the like, agreement depends on whether those involved admit the action as right."

to reject a blanket objection to my analysis on the basis of an _a priori_ argument to the effect that the news claim is nothing but a ploy, i.e. a perlocutionary effect intended to get the reader to buy the paper, nothing more.

The first question then is to consider in what way the explicit illocutionary force of the published narrative can be said to make an _objective news claim_. I said above that this explicit illocutionary force declares the news value of the narrative and thereby requires the journalist to "redeem" with reasons the thereby implicitly-expressed news judgment proper, "**R**(**e**) is newsworthy." I now want to suggest that the _objective claim_ made by such judgments refers to the _amount of new or timely information_ contained in the report, i.e. the amount of information associated with the occurrence of **e**. To "redeem" this objective claim, a journalist must show its assertoric validity by reasons that support or establish that the amount of information asserted to obtain does in fact obtain. Such, indeed, is the general gist of the arguments to come in subsequent chapters.

Meanwhile, however, I need to address the second point noted above, based on a general argument against my attempt to appropriate Habermas for an analysis of the rationality of journalistic news judgment. The gist of that argument is that I have ignored a point that Habermas is careful to insist upon: Communicative action explicitly excludes the pursuit perlocutionary aims, the use of illocutionary means to achieve some other, concealed end. The reason the latter is excluded is because, for Habermas, "communicatively achieved agreement" is constituted by criticism, and only by criticism, of validity claims raised in communicative utterances. That is, communicative agreement is to be established solely by actors "unreservedly pursuing illocutionary aims."[27]

This restriction thus rules out, the objector will claim, journalistic communication as a form of communicative action in Habermas's sense. The journalistic utterance, at least in the North American newspaper context, is one that is designed to be sold for money. Hence, so the objector will go on, the "success" or rationality of such utterances is determined by whether or not the sale is made, not by its role in processes of "communicatively achieved agreement." The _prima facie_ weight of this objection is considerable; its full force will not be disposed of until chapter five. I raise the objection here, and indeed, already hinted at it in the Introduction, to indicate its importance.[28] As

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[27]Habermas, I, p. 305, and see also pp. 286 - 295. E.g., again, when I warn my neighbour about his roof, I "unreservedly" (a) warn him, (b) claim that his roof is dangerous or about to fall down, and (c) am truthful, i.e. I have no "hidden agenda" in issuing this warning, like trying to sell him my house, or getting him to buy a new roof.

[28]This objection could be called the Objection of the Brass Check. Cf. Upton Sinclair, _The Brass Check: A Study of American Journalism_, Pasadena, Calif.: Published by the

stated, this objection challenges _any_ attempt to philosophize about journalistic news judgment, because it is not just an objection against this or that tainted piece of journalism: It is an _a priori_ objection to the very possibility of epistemic rationality, i.e. truth-seeking journalism in commercialized mass communication.

One of the first points to be made in considering this objection is to note that one of the advantages of considering journalistic news judgment under Habermas's umbrella is that this objection can be allowed full play. That is, the commercial interest of mass media corporations is not just an extraneous economic fact of life for journalism -- which somehow needs to be kept in check through either self-regulation or legislation -- but an intrinsic element in assessing the rationality or validity of the news judgment process itself. Furthermore, as already suggested, it is also within Habermas's theory that the solution can be found to this problem of truth in "commercialized" journalism. That solution, it now appears, depends on our being able to insist that the illocutionary force of the published news narrative raises a _distinct_

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author, 1920, who denounced the journalists of his day in no uncertain terms: "The Brass Check is found in your pay-envelope each week -- you who write and print and distribute our newspapers and magazines. The Brass Check is the price of your shame -- you who take the fair body of truth and sell it in the market-place, who betray the virgin hopes of mankind in the loathsome brothel of Big Business." (p. 436) validity claim, a claim that does not disappear simply because the publication may <u>also</u> pursue other perlocutionary aims, such as getting people to buy the publication.

Now I submit that since there is nothing <u>hidden</u> or <u>concealed</u> in this perlocutionary and pecuniary interest of the news medium -- the price is clearly marked -- the objection can be dismissed, at least in so far as it is intended to be an <u>a priori</u> objection. Not only is there nothing secretive or subtle about this perlocutionary "effect" of the collected news narratives, this perlocutionary aim is dependent on the explicit illocutionary force of these narratives.[29] That is, the intended result -- purchase of the publication -- would hardly be realized if there were "nothing else to" the narratives in the publication.[30] Thus, while the Brass Check objection raises a pertinent issue, it does not undermine the point: the primary validity claim made by the

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[29]Cf. Habermas, I, p. 305, where Habermas clearly acknowledges that there are illocutionary acts, such as simple imperatives, "with which the speaker <u>openly</u> declares his aim of influencing the decisions of his opposite number, and in so doing has to base the success of his power claim on supplementary sanctions. Thus with genuine imperatives -- requests and demands that lack normative authorization [such as the request to purchase a newspaper] -- speakers can unreservedly pursue illocutionary aims and nonetheless act with an orientation to success rather than to understanding."

[30]A college newspaper, for example, that resorted to the "Sex! Sex! Sex!" trick too often would soon make itself totally ridiculous. It works, but only once, and that usually only in "frosh week."

illocutionary force of a published news narrative is an objective (or constative or assertoric) validity claim about the newsworthiness of certain events or states of affairs.[31] But just how such a "validity claim" is to be analyzed and understood remains to be seen.

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[31]Notice, however, that if we cannot establish that there are reasons for the distinct validity claim of the news judgment proper, then there would appear to be no alternative left but the view that it is success in the market place <u>alone</u> that counts in determining the rationality of journalism.

CHAPTER II

Validity and the Lifeworld

Arguments in the previous chapter showed that neither the truth of the information content nor that of news narratives is necessary or sufficient for the validity of journalistic news judgments proper. So the question becomes: What is relevant for their validity? In the next chapter I will argue that it is the amount of information in reports judged to be newsworthy that counts in the determination of the validity of such judgments.

But before developing that argument, it will be useful to consider how journalists themselves conceive of the validity, or rationality, of their news judgments. What reasons do journalists advance to justify or "redeem" their judgments of newsworthiness? What, if anything, is wrong with their reasoning? In the first part of this chapter, then, I will consider the objectivist and subjectivist journalistic arguments about the validity of their news judgments.

In the concluding half of this chapter I pick up on another point made in the previous chapter, namely that the validity or rationality of news judgments proper needs to be considered in a context of communicative action. Since it is through the explicit illocutionary force of the published news narratives that the news judgment proper is asserted and its associated validity claims are made, it seems evident that whatever illocutionary success a published news narrative has will depend, at least in part, on what we already know. Communicative action does not take place in an epistemic vacuum. It takes place, as Habermas was careful to point out and develop, within and against a *lifeworld*. Accordingly, an explanation of that notion is in order.

News as Objective Reality

That journalists have reasons for their news judgments is not difficult to establish. As Romano has argued, "...press coverage is rational in the sense that reasons exist for every story published...and every story spiked....But we are also stuck with an anarchy of reasons, a potpourri of principles as unconnected as the passengers who board a random plane flight....a kind of rational anarchy rules."[1] However, as already indicated above,[2] this potpourri rationality of "reasons for" journalistic news judgments, is not the kind of rationality philosophy is interested in; empirical research would suffice to identify those reasons.[3] It is of philosophical interest to inquire what, if anything, makes those principles of journalistic news judgment rational? That is, what if anything accounts for the validity of the news judgments made in accordance with those principles?

The general journalistic answer to this latter question is, and has been, in one form or another,[4] that their

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[1]Carlin Romano, "The Grisly Truth about Bare Facts," in Reading the News, Robert Karl Manoff and Michael Schudson, eds., New York: Pantheon Books, 1987, pp. 60 - 61.

[2]Pp. 35 - 37, above.

[3]Romano provides such a list, op.cit., pp. 48 - 58. His list of "reasons" for press coverage include such empirically-based generalizations as "The Press Covers Congress", "The Press Covers Labor-Management Relations", "The Press Covers Elections", "The Press Covers Disasters", "The Press Covers the Formerly Famous", "The Press Covers the Possible", "The Press Covers Anniversaries", etc.

[4]Historically, in response to criticism, objectivism evolved from a naive realist empiricism to a more interpretive stance. What primarily distinguishes these various approaches, however, is the perceived role of the journalist in reporting and recording this objectively-present news. The dominant, interpretive school of objectivity sees the journalist as a discriminating interpreter of objectively real news events, and denounces earlier conceptions that saw the journalist as a passive chronicler or objective spectator. It would be tedious, for my purposes here, to detail these various nuances in detail. For an excellent discussion of various journalistic

reasons refer to or capture certain intrinsic or objective qualities of the events judged to be newsworthy. This doctrine of objectivity, in fact, can be regarded as the underlying rationality theory journalists use to justify and defend their news judgments and its associated validity claims.[5] That is, journalists appeal to the doctrine to justify the validity of their news claims, the fairness of their narratives, and the rightness of their decisions to publish. For my purposes, the validity claim of interest is the objective or constative claim to the effect that the state of affairs or event reported is newsworthy. The objectivist's or realist's justification (or "redemption" in Habermas's terms) of this claim is that those events or

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approaches to the problem of objectivity see Donald McDonald, "Is Objectivity Possible?" in The Center Magazine (Centre for the Study of Democratic Institutions, Santa Barbara, Calif.), Vol. VI, No. 5 (Sept/Oct., 1971). Everrette C. Dennis, in his article, "Journalistic objectivity is possible," in Everrette C. Dennis and John C. Merrill, Basic Issues in Mass Communication, New York: MacMillan, 1984, makes the point that rival approaches to objectivity in news reporting all claim, in the end, "to be more objective than traditional objectivity." (p. 113)

[5]It should be noted here that one of the shortcomings of journalistic reasoning about their craft is that the logically distinct aspects of news judgment are not sufficiently delineated. In the Introduction I emphasized the importance of distinguishing between the news judgment proper, the narrative encoding of this judgment, and the judgment that the narrative is worthy of publication. Each of these "judgments" results in a decision in the overall newsmaking process. Most discussions in journalism texts, for example, fail to make these distinctions and speak of "news judgment" indiscriminately to cover sometimes one, sometimes another aspect, and often all three at once.

states of affairs possess certain intrinsic or objective "news values" or properties that make them newsworthy. Among the usual news values listed in textbooks are (1) timeliness, (2) geographical proximity, (3) eminence or notoriety of persons involved, (4) importance of the subject, and (5) intrinsic human interest of the event or state of affairs in question.[6]

The difficulty with this reasoning as a defence of the validity of a news judgment is that it commits the naturalistic fallacy. This fallacy was first identified by G. E. Moore in the context of ethics, but it applies here as well. The gist of that fallacy is that if the objectivist defends the news claim about some event on the grounds that the event has certain qualities, the "open question" argument becomes relevant. The "open question" argument applies to cases where one property is defined in terms of

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[6]Such "intrinsic" properties of events included characteristics like conflict, progress, disaster, consequence, eminence, novelty, human interest, importance, interest, timeliness, proximity. James L. Gaudino, in a comprehensive synthesis of empirical findings, "A Predictive Framework for Determining How Journalists Determine News," Paper Presented at Theory and Methodology Division, Annual Conference of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, July, 1988, has listed 32 "empirically testable propositions relating news values to professional, organizational, and personal influences acting upon journalists," but concludes that "This attempt to define news is...far from complete, It is actually a beginning of a project rather than a completion." (p. 31)

other real properties.[7] In the case of newsworthiness, given a definition of that concept in terms of objective qualities of events, it may still be asked why, given those qualities, the event should be considered newsworthy. If the objectivist then answers that the event is newsworthy because having those qualities is what "newsworthy" means, the stipulative nature of the definition and hence the circularity of the argument is evident. The objectivist cannot claim to be saying something significant, when all that is being offered is some guidance on how to use the word "newsworthy."[8]

A further difficulty with the objectivist position is that even if we somehow could make sense of "news values" as objective attributes of events judged to be news,[9] we still need some "meta-newsvalues" to rank the events so identified

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[7]Moore was concerned with the definitions of non-natural properties, such as "goodness" or "rightness", matters I need not get into here.

[8]My application of Moore's naturalistic fallacy to the present context owes much to W. D. Hudson's exposition of it in his Modern Moral Philosophy, sec. ed., London and Basingstoke: The MacMillan Press, 1983, chapter 3.

[9]The general difficulty associated with text-book definitions of "news" has been recently illustrated by George Padgett's "disappointing search" for a clear definition of news. [He found none.] ("In search of a usable definition of news for the classroom," Journalism Educator, Autumn, 1990.) Padgett, incidentally, refers to the social-scientific concept of news as "what is printed or broadcast" as the "ultimate cop out." (Padgett, op.cit., p. 89.)

as "more" and "less" newsy. Harriss and Johnson, for example, note:

> News must be measured for its comparative importance....Are there any scales upon which the news commodity can be weighed to determine its specific gravity or importance....Are there any principles to guide the reporter and the editor in selecting from the mass the most important news?
>
> The best answer is "No." Just as the news essence, so also the news magnitude is best recognized or "felt" by intuition or instinct. The "nose for news" that detects the odor must determine also whether the odor is strong or weak. The problem is, perhaps, one and the same.[10]

Having said that, the authors go on to suggest that "extensity" and "intensity" are two "useful" measures to arrive at such a ranking.[11]

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[10]Harriss and Johnson, op.cit., p. 33. Cf. Lippmann on the same point, who argued that "Every newspaper when it reaches the reader is the result of a whole series of selections as to what items shall be printed, in what position they shall be printed, how much space each shall occupy, what emphasis each shall have. *There are no objective standards here*...." (*Public Opinion*, p. 354, my italics.)

[11]"An actual odor may be strong (or weak) in one neighborhood, or it may cover a whole community. The decaying carcass of a horse, for example, might disturb the neighbors for several blocks. The odor from leaking gas tanks might stifle the whole city. Both would be news. If the intensity were equal, the large city-wide extension of the odor would make a bigger story. On the other hand, if the carcass (undiscovered) should drive a few neighbors from their homes, and the gas odor should be merely annoying, the intensity could outweigh the extensity in measuring the importance of the story." (Op.cit., pp. 33-34.)

For now, the point to note is that a distinction needs to be made between "news values" which allegedly pick out news events, and "factors of magnitude". The latter, in the words of Harriss and Johnson, are factors which "as rationalizations, measure the importance of the news".[12] I think it is clear that whatever merit there might be to the notion of "factors of magnitude",[13] so long as such "factors of magnitude" are taken to refer to objective properties associated with events, it is not a helpful notion.

What makes the objectivist stance attractive is that it appears to account for the validity of journalistic news judgments proper in terms of their <u>truth</u>. To see whether or not an event or state of affairs is newsworthy, all that needs to be done is to "look and see" whether or not the event has the required properties or characteristics. The objectivist will not be impressed with my argument in the previous chapter because that argument was based on the idea that it is the <u>report</u> that is judged to be newsworthy, not the event. To insist, as I will, that it is reports, or information associated with events -- and not the events

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[12]Harriss and Johnson, <u>op.cit.</u>, p.35.

[13]And there is merit to the idea, as I will indicate in the next chapter, where at least some of these "factors of magnitude" will be reinterpreted as "constants" affecting the determination of the amount of information in a report.

themselves -- that are judged to be newsworthy, I need only point out that the objectivist alternative seems to presuppose some notion of events-as-they-are-in-themselves, a metaphysical idea of dubious merit since Kant.[14]

The alternative to the objectivist position, however, is in no better position to offer an account of the valdity of journalistic news judgments proper. According to the subjectivists, journalistic news judgments <u>create</u> the news. Questions about the validity of such judgments are seen as questions about the sincerity and motivation of the journalists making them and the ethical rightness of publishing the narratives based on them. What the news <u>is</u> in fact becomes and remains problematic.

Sigal, one of the clearest journalistic exponents of this subjectivist viewpoint, makes much of the fact that uncertainty about the reality of news [and he was talking specifically about news originating in Washington] is one of the main sources of stress and strain on journalists: "Of all the strains that newsmen experience," he writes, "none is as poignant as their uncertainty about what news is and what it means."[15] It is this uncertainty, he argues, that

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[14]In addition to these metaphysical problems, there is the practical difficulty that only a few events are directly reported by journalists; most news originates in reports provided by various sources. Thus, the objectivist's vaunted alliance with truth quickly evaporates.

[15] Sigal, <u>Reporters and Officials</u>, p. 92.

contributes to causing journalists to "travel in packs" and "cluster around" routine channels of information:

> Uncertainty loves company; the similarity of their stories provides some reassurance that newsmen understand what is going on in the world. For men who do not and cannot know what the 'real' news is, the routines of newsgathering produce 'certified news' -- information that seems valid insofar as it is common knowledge among newsmen and their sources.[16]

News judgment, in Sigal's view, is the outcome of "organizational politics" and "organizational routine."[17] Gans, whose study of news making was more extensive than Sigal's, reached similar conclusions.[18] Clearly, if this were all that could be said about the matter, questions about the assertoric or objective validity of news judgments would seem hopelessly naive. Equally clearly, however, as the juxtaposition of the New York Times and Weekly World News would seem to indicate, it would appear that there is a prima facie distinction to be made in the journalism that is practised at these places, and so it does indeed become

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[16] Sigal, op.cit., p. 130.

[17] Sigal, op.cit., p. 181.

[18] Herbert Gans, Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek and Time, New York: Pantheon Books, 1979.

difficult, as Mayer noted, "to maintain patience with this supercilious foolishness"[19] of the subjectivists and their social scientific theorizing about journalism.

What the foregoing overview of journalistic reasoning about the validity of their judgments shows is, (a) that such thinking would benefit from the kind of analysis being offered here, a point I will not pursue here, and (b) in addition to their substantive shortcoming, their reasoning fails to consider the significance of the context of communication. To deal with this latter point, I need to return to the context of communicative action.

The 'Lifeworld' Context

Since the notion of journalistic news judgment in general was put into the context of Habermas's theory of communicative action, I turn again to that theory to appropriate Habermas's communication-theoretic concept of

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[19]Martin Mayer, Making News, Garden City: Double Day, 1987, p. 21. Specifically, Mayer was referring to some of the sociological studies of journalism by Harvey Molotch, Marilyn Lester and Michael Schudson. More on them in the next chapter. Meanwhile, I would not like to leave the impression Mayer has correctly understood the issue of truth in journalism. For him, in the end, its rationality is that of the marketplace: "In the world of news, one reconstructs the sound that the tree makes falling in the forest when there is no one to hear. If -- only if -- there is reason to believe that enough of the consumers of this particular news product will care to hear." (Op.cit., p. 25) That observation is beside the point, for the point at issue is what makes journalistic news judgments proper valid.

the "lifeworld"[20] so that I may apply it in the information-theoretic analysis of news judgment proper to be presented in the next two chapters. While this notion of the lifeworld plays a multiple role in Habermas's broad-ranging reflections, for now I need only to consider what he called its communication-theoretic aspects.[21]

For Habermas, communicative action takes place _against_ and _within_ a lifeworld structured by language and culture. Within this lifeworld, each communicative action aimed at reaching mutual understanding among participants, thematizes[22] a situation, including all that is brought into the discussion as relevant to it. Simultaneously, the situation presupposes the lifeworld as a background or "_predetermined_ domain of what is culturally taken for

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[20]This notion of the "lifeworld" or _Lebenswelt_ is not new with Habermas, but derives from Weber, and was adapted by others, notably Husserl. Habermas considers their concepts in some detail, which need not detain us here.

[21]I readily admit that my appropriation of Habermas's communication-theoretic concept of the lifeworld represents an incomplete, and somewhat opportunistic interpretation thereof for the purposes at hand. I also think, however, that it is consistent with the broader concept of the lifeworld that he develops.

[22]Habermas uses this verb, "thematize", to indicate that something has been rendered problematic, or explicit, or articulated, or made into an object or topic of reflection or discussion. Thus, for example, in a discussion of baseball, the game of baseball is what is thematized, i.e. it has become the "theme" of the discussion.

granted."[23] For specific situations in which communicative action takes place, the lifeworld as this background or backdrop of "culturally transmitted and linguistically organized stock of interpretive patterns"[24] can "shift" as the discussion develops or the situation changes.

Habermas's example is the "order" given to the "new man" on a construction crew to get the beer for the morning break, apparently a custom among Bavarian construction workers. Now, if the "new man" is a foreign worker, he may not know of this custom, and thus question the order causing hitherto unquestioned, but now pertinent, elements of the lifeworld background to be brought into the situation. For example, if the worker responds, "But I am not thirsty," he may be told that this is irrelevant: Bavarian construction workers have their morning beer whether one or more of them is thirsty or not. Or he might reply, "But I have no car," thereby raising questions about the existential presuppositions of the order, such as the distance of the nearest beer store.[25]

Different elements of the lifeworld may be rendered problematic as the understanding of the situation, or the

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[23]Habermas, II, p. 125.

[24]Habermas, II, p. 124.

[25]Habermas, II, pp. 121-123.

situation itself, changes. These different elements are brought into the situation as the validity claims associated with the speech acts of the participants are questioned or challenged.[26] The lifeworld itself, as a whole and as the unquestioned, taken-for-granted background cannot thus become a part of the discussion; it always remains as the background. Before a certain state of affairs or circumstance becomes relevant to a situation,

> the same circumstance is given only in the mode of something taken for granted in the lifeworld, something with which those involved are intuitively familiar without anticipating the possibility of its becoming problematic. It is not even 'known' in any strict sense, if this entails that it can be justified and contested. Only the limited segments of the lifeworld brought into the horizon of a situation constitute a thematizable context of action oriented to mutual understanding; only they appear under the category of knowledge. From a perspective turned toward the situation, the lifeworld appears as a reservoir of taken-for-granteds, of unshaken convictions that participants in communication draw upon in cooperative processes of interpretation. Single elements, specific taken-for-granteds,

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[26]As noted earlier, each utterance may be criticized, questioned or defended with respect to its truth, normative appropriateness or sincerity. "Concensus does not come about when, for example, a hearer accepts the truth of an assertion but at the same time doubts the sincerity of the speaker or the normative appropriateness of his utterance; the same holds for the case in which a speaker accepts the normative validity of a command but suspects the seriousness of the intent thereby expressed or has doubts about the existential presuppositions of the action commanded (and thus about the possibility of carrying it out)." Habermas, II, p. 121.

> are, however, mobilized in the form of consensual and yet problematizable knowledge only when they become relevant to a situation.[27]

As a new element, or circumstance, becomes relevant to a situation of communicative action, participants find themselves, so Habermas notes, "in another, now actualized, yet preinterpreted domain of what is culturally taken for granted."[28] This point seems rather obvious,[29] but has important implications for my dissertation. Habermas puts it this way:

> In everyday communicative practice there are no completely unfamiliar situations. Every new situation appears in a lifeworld composed of a cultural stock of knowledge that is 'always already' familiar. Communicative actors can no more take up an extramundane position in relation to their lifeworld than they can in relation to language as the medium for the processes of reaching understanding through which their lifeworld

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[27] Habermas, II, p. 124.

[28] Habermas, II, p. 125.

[29] For example, in the case of Habermas's construction workers, if the new man says he has no money to pay for this beer, he will at least be understood, and his fellow workers may advance him the money, or let him off, or they may question the truth of his assertion. The point is, that as a new circumstance is introduced to a situation, it is as something that would and could be taken-for-granted (such as here, the fact that he had the pocket money to pay for the beer) until such time as it is specifically thematized in the situation through communicative action or an objective change in the situation itself.

> maintains itself. In drawing upon a cultural tradition, they also continue it.[30]

The general relevance of this point to the notion of journalistic news judgment -- which deals with reports on these "new situations" -- is obvious. But in what way is this aspect of the lifeworld specifically relevant to the communicative action context of journalistic news judgment proper? What does it have to do, for example, with the determination that the fire at the town hall last night constitutes news?

I suggest that one obvious way in which the concept of the lifeworld is relevant here is that it *constrains* the "journalistic imagination"[31] as to what is "reasonable" to believe in connection with reports about this fire. Such beliefs, whatever they are, must be consistent with the lifeworld as the culturally-transmitted stock of taken-for-granted beliefs about fires. That would rule out, for example, the suggestion that the fire was set by an evil

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[30]Habermas, II, p. 125.

[31]Adam's phrase, derived from Wright Mills, to refer to "a quality of mind which helps men 'to achieve *lucid summations* of what is going on in the world and what may be happening within themselves.'" (My italics here. G. Stuart Adam, "The Journalistic Imagination," in *Journalism, Communication and the Law*, G. Stuart Adam, ed. Scarborough, Ont.: Prentice-Hall of Canada, 1976, p. 5. The quote is from Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1959.)

spirit or malevolent demon, since beliefs in such spirits or demons are no longer a part of our North American lifeworld.[32]

I would like to make one additional point, before turning to information theory to make some of these matters more explicit. As the unquestioned, taken-for-granted background of communicative action, the logical consistency of this culturally-transmitted domain of linguistically-embodied information, generalizations, norms, and values taken as a whole escapes scrutiny from within that lifeworld. However, once elements of this lifeworld enter a situation, i.e. become articulated in a context of communicative action, the logical consistency of the diverse elements admitted as relevant to that situation does become pertinent with respect to the rationality of the communicative action within that situation.[33]

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[32]Another way to put this point would be to observe that if the suggestion concerning the evil spirit was made in the context of a communicative action situation in which the cause of the fire was the subject, that suggestion would not advance the discussion, that is, it would not contribute to the goal of reaching agreement as to what the cause was, given whatever evidence existed.

[33]Habermas does not raise this point, perhaps because it is so patently obvious. We could hardly speak of a "rationally motivated agreement" in mutual understanding if it were based on a set of inconsistent beliefs. However, it should be noted that it would be an acceptable argumentative strategy to show that a participant in a situation held views that, though consistent as they stand, jointly contradict some other, not yet-thematized, aspect of the lifeworld -- thereby, of course, thematizing it. In such circumstances, the participant would be required to either

So far, in speaking of "situations" in which communicative action serves to achieve mutual understanding, or consensus, I have followed Habermas by construing such "situations" as structured by equal participants oriented to achieving such understanding in an atmosphere of free and open discussion. Clearly, the "situation" in which the communicative action on the part of journalists takes place is somewhat different. For one thing, there is no direct context of dialogue; journalistic communication, as many critics have noted, is primarily a one-way street.[34]

I have already pointed out that the uniqueness of the journalistic news judgment proper consists in its being a public declaration, aimed at a general public.[35] As such,

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give up one or more of his previously-held and already-articulated beliefs, or, reject as either irrelevant or false, the newly-thematized aspect of the lifeworld.

[34]There is no feedback, or, only very limited feedback, such as a letter to the editor, or complaint to a press council or newspaper ombudsman. In other words, the give-and-take of real-life situations of communicative action oriented to achieving mutual understanding does not exist for the context of journalism.

[35]I readily grant that this way of putting the matter skips over some profound and interesting philosophical, as well as practical, issues. How is this notion of a "general public" to be understood? As a mere collectivity of individuals? Or as a community? And if the latter, what kind of community? A full philosophical analysis of all the validity claims made in a published news narrative will need to address such questions in more detail than I can do here. For the purposes at hand, the understanding of the objective validity claim in a news judgment, it suffices to understand by "general public" a collectivity of individuals sharing a more or less similar lifeworld. I admit that this

it draws attention to new situations which may, or may not, be relevant to all manner of situational contexts in which communicative action, among individuals, is either in progress, or desirable, or at an impasse, or at the stage where the achieved concensus is in need of revision, to mention but some possibilities. That fact about journalism is, I suggest, a more or less intuitive way to think of journalistic communicative action as a generalized form of communicative action.

For example, news reports about the start of the Persian Gulf war can readily be imagined to have had a "general" impact on communicative action involving different participants seeking consensus on action orientation in a wide variety of "situations", such as (a) going on holiday in Israel, (b) family planning, (c) joining the navy, (d) buying or selling gold, or (e) filling a 45-gallon drum with gasoline before the price goes up.

Habermas's more technical notion of generalized forms of communication, points to the presence of "influence" and "value commitment" in such communicative action as a kind of "shortcut" in the process of reasoning leading to consensus,

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oversimplifies complex issues, e.g. that, for example, the lifeworld of men and women may be distinct in important respects, sufficiently distinct, in fact, to result in some radical differences in what reports get to be judged as newsworthy. I also think, however, that the very fact that this point emerges here is an argument in favor of my analysis.

or mutual understanding.[36] While Habermas does not discuss the specifics of journalism as a generalized form of communicative action, its "influence" derives from the fact that through its mass circulation, the journalist speaks with a very loud voice indeed. This loud voice not only enables the journalist to influence simultaneously many and various "situations" of communicative action, the loudness of the voice also proclaims, generally in no uncertain

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[36]It is a form of lifeworld-anchored communicative action that uses its influence and value commitments to exert a kind of "pressure" to achieve consensus and, as such, falls outside the context of both communicative action proper (reasons alone count there) and a media-driven, systemic rationality that has become "uncoupled" from the reason-giving context of the lifeworld. Such media include money, in the economic sphere, and power, in the bureaucratic, administrative areas of life. To get an intuitive "feel" of these distinct ways of "achieving agreement on action orientation" consider the case of trying to persuade the neighbor's boy to shovel snow off one's driveway. Argument alone may prevail, but will likely require considerable rational effort. That would be communicative action. The argument might be cut short if one could show, for example, a front-page picture and story that positively portray teenagers shovelling snow. [Alternatively, but similarly generalized forms of communicative action, one could cite last Sunday's sermon on the virtue of doing good for one's neighbor, like shovelling snow; or cite a scientific authority on the health benefits teenagers can derive from shovelling snow.] This would be generalized communicative action, providing a "shortcut" as it were to the painful process of "reasoning with the kid". Lastly, one could dispense with reasoning altogether by simply offering the boy $100 to shovel the snow. In that case, the use of money allows the "situation" to be uncoupled (Habermas's word) from the lifeworld entirely.

terms, the background value commitments of the lifeworld as embodied in its narratives.[37]

In this chapter I have tried to show that (a) journalistic reasoning to account for the validity of news judgments is deficient, underscoring the need for a more adequate, philosophical understanding of such validity, and (b) prepared the way for an information-theoretic account of this validity claim by further anchoring the notion of news judgment in Habermas's theory of communicative action.

[37]This, in my view, is one of the chief research results recorded in Richard V. Ericson, Patricia M. Baranek and Janet B. L. Chan, Visualizing Deviance: A Study of News Organization, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987. Their study concluded journalists are part of the "deviance-defining élite" (p. 357). Cf. also Herbert Gans's study of the "enduring values" operating in the background of journalistic news judgment proper. Gans, *op.cit.*, pp. 42 - 69.

CHAPTER III

The Core Concept of News

Arguments in the previous chapters have shown that the objective or assertoric validity of a news judgment proper -- the judgment that a report about some event or state of affairs is news -- cannot be accounted for by (i) the truth of the report, (ii) alleged "qualities" of the event reported, or (iii) the conventions of the journalistic craft. I now want to argue that it is the *amount of information in the report judged to be newsworthy* that is the relevant factor in the determination of whether or not a news judgment proper is objectively, or assertorically valid.

But before I can specify this validity condition, I need a concept of newsworthiness that is based on the notion of amount of information in a report. Given the communication context, this will be a relative concept of news, not an absolute one. To develop this notion, my strategy in this chapter will be to adapt the mathematical theory of information to arrive at a measure for the amount of information in a report, or **iR(e)**, a measure that is relative to some life world. This quantitative notion -- **iR(e)** is the number of **bits of information** associated with **R(e)** -- will then be used to define a "core concept" of news.[1] Given this core concept of news, arguments in the next chapter will specify certain objective constraints on the determination of **iR(e)**, and I will argue that it is these objective constraints that constitute the "assertoric validity" condition for news judgments proper. But before proceeding with these arguments, I need to make two qualifications.

The first qualification is that if we take this notion of "amount of information in a report" as an "information value", it clearly is not the <u>only</u> information value, least of all for journalists. Information may have problem-solving value, or emotional value, or entertainment value,

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[1]It will take the form of something along the lines "A report, **R(e)**, is newsworthy if and only if **iR(e)** ...." with the elipses specifying certain quantitative conditions to be be spelled out. I should emphasize here that I do not propose to create journalistic rationality by definition. As a formal idea, this "core concept" of newsworthiness will countenance mermaids, resurrected Kennedys and all manner of other nonsense. Additional arguments will be required to specify the assertoric validity condition.

to mention but some other information values. Similarly, news stories -- and the reports on which they are based -- may have information values that have little, if anything, to do with the *amount* of information they convey. Such stories, for example, would include routine weather or so-called "human interest" stories, or "follow-up" accounts that describe consequences of previous news items, or "reader service" articles. So why pick on "amount of information" as *the* information value that is to bear the validity burden?

Other than certain intuitions based on journalistic practice,[2] I have no immediate answer to that question. I can only hope that my arguments here will demonstrate that "amount of information in a report" is, indeed, serviceable for this purpose. Meanwhile, I will grant that there are news values *other than* amount of information.[3]

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[2]Which it would be tedious to detail at length. Suffice it to note that, in journalism, "more" usually means "newsier." In addition, I think it could be shown that many articles that are published because of these other information values are, in a significant way, related to earlier articles on the same topic, the initial publication of which was based on reports with a relatively high information content. The latter, for example, is the case with "follow-up" stories, or stories about the rich, famous and powerful.

[3]My focus is the work of professional journalists, whose news stories are intended to be relevant, i.e. contribute, to the ongoing communicative action in a society. So I thin that despite this restriction on the scope of the proposed "core concept" of news, it will cover most, if not all, *significant* cases of news judgment. Cf. Robert E. Park, "News and the Human Interest Story," in

The second qualification pertains to the nature of the "objectivity" or "assertoric validity" of the news judgment proper. It should be clear from my having placed the notion of news judgment proper in a Habermasian context of communicative action, that this "assertoric validity" is relative to situations within a particular lifeworld.[4] Similarly, to speak of the "objectivity" of a news judgment proper means that while such judgments refer to real events happening to real people in a real world, this reality is apprehended in terms of the resources of that communication-theoretic lifeworld. The concept of "assertoric validity" is a pragmatic concept, as will become evident.[5]

Collected Papers of Robert Ezra Park, Vol. III, Everett C. Hughes, ed. Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1955, pp. 105 - 114.

[4]For the purposes of this dissertation, this lifeworld is the North American lifeworld. I grant, as before, that it may well be that there is no such lifeworld, and that what I "really mean" is the white, male, middle-class North American lifeworld. The reason I am prepared to grant this point is simply that, if valid, the objection is a point in favor of my analysis of journalistic news judgment. Granting the objection means that, given my account of news judgment, it becomes possible to argue -- in the sense of "giving reasons for" -- dissident news judgments on the journalist's own grounds.

[5] Whatever validity journalistic news judgments may have is a validity that "fits" what Sellars called the "manifest image", not the "scientific image" or metaphysical noumenal realm. (Wilfrid Sellars, "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man," in his Science, Perception and Reality, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1963.) It should be kept in mind, of course, that this "manifest image" is a dynamic one, constantly incorporating elements of the "scientific image" as the latter is absorbed by the

The Concept of Information

Up to this point I have been using the word "information" in an informal way. Since I will be following Dretske's philosophical use of the mathematical theory of information, the concept of information I am after is what he called its "nuclear sense".[6] This nuclear sense of "information" captures most of its informal sense, but excludes some common uses of the word, e.g. it does not fit phrases like "false information" or "misleading information." This is how Dretske explains it:[7]

> A state of affairs [including what I have called reports] contains information about X to just that extent to which a suitably placed observer could learn something about X by consulting it. This, I suggest, is the very same sense in which we speak of books, newspapers, and authorities as containing, or having, information about a particular topic, and I shall refer to it as the nuclear sense of the term "information."
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> In this sense of the term, false information and mis-information are not kinds of information -- any more than decoy duck and rubber ducks are kinds of ducks....if we consult a dictionary, we find information described most frequently in terms of "intelligence," "news," "instruction," and "knowledge." These terms are suggestive. They have a common nucleus. They all point in the

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communication-theoretic "lifeworld" of modern society. I will later refer to this as "lifeworld science".

[6] Fred I. Dretske, Knowledge and the Flow of Information, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1981, p. 45.

[7] Ibid.

> same direction -- the direction of truth. Information is what is capable of yielding knowledge, and since knowledge requires truth, information requires it also.

I will be using the word "information" in the sense explained above. The reports journalists judge to be newsworthy, or not newsworthy, are information reports in this nuclear sense of "information." The news judgment proper, in its expanded, general form, "'R_t(**that p**)' is newsworthy", points to the direction of truth in that it refers to what is allegedly the case, to wit, **that p**, where **p** could be, to take two earlier examples, "The town hall is on fire" or "Mermaids saved my life".

Since I have already shown that truth, by itself, is neither necessary nor sufficient for the validity of a news judgment, this condition on information -- that it "points to truth" or that the recipient thereof be able to "learn" something -- may seem too strong, especially since it excludes falsehoods as information. Given, however, that the context of news judgment is that of communicative action -- the discursive activity between individuals seeking to reach agreement or a common understanding about what is the case, what to do, etc. -- the exclusion of deliberate or known falsehoods as items of information seems appropriate.[8] The requirement that information "point to truth" is clearly not the same as requiring that the information <u>be</u> true. All that is required is that the information "point to what is alleged to be the case" so long as the "pointing" is done in good faith, i.e. without an intention to mislead.

In turning to the mathematical theory of information to arrive at a quantitative concept of amount of information in a report, I am following Dretske's lead in using elements of this theory as an analytical tool. My use of this theory, however, is less complex than Dretske's and has no need for several of his ingenious philosophical adaptations and reinterpretations. His goal is to develop a full-fledged epistemology based on a concept of semantic information in perceptual signals. Though he was aware of the fact that what can be learned depends in part on what is already known, his primary focus is epistemology, not communication.[9]

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[8]It is appropriate because, though deliberate falsehood is excluded, the notion of "pointing toward truth", i.e. potential truth, also allows for <u>potential</u> falsehood, or error, which is all that is needed here. If a report can be shown to be false, for example, we would say that it contains <u>no</u> information. That is what happens, for example, in the case of the police report about the town hall fire. Later and conflicting information, more likely to be true, invalidates the earlier police report which can then be said to contain no information about the town hall fire at all.

[9]Cf. Dretske, <u>op.cit.</u>, p. 132.

I, on the other hand, only need to get a concept of "amount of information" in a report. I can take the "semantic content" of such reports as a given, to wit, the content of a report is what the source (usually a person other than the journalist, though it could also be the journalist's own, eye-witness report about an event) said about some event. Put another way, it is sufficient for my purposes to take what is reported as the semantic information content of a report.[10] The information content of a report, R_t(**that p**) is **that p**, and refers to what **p** says. For example, the information content of the report, "The police say that the town hall is on fire" is "The town hall is on fire" which refers to an (alleged) fire at the town hall.

Furthermore, I will take **that p** to be about **e** in the sense that **p** states something non-trivial about the occurrence of event **e**. In the above case, **e** is the alleged fire at the town hall. I am not interested in exploring how we could come to know that the town hall is on fire given the report in question. I readily grant, naturally, that given the police report about the town hall fire, it may be perfectly reasonably to come to believe that the town hall is on fire. But that is not my interest. My interest is in

[10]Dretske explicitly excludes de dicto information signals, for reasons we need not go into here. Cf. Dretske, op. cit., pp. 66 - 68.

determining what it is about such reports that journalists judge to be newsworthy. And my argument is that journalists judge such reports on the basis of the relative amount of information in them.

While my use of the mathematical theory of information is less sophisticated than Dretske's, his philosophical _caveat_ remains in full force: the theory cannot be used as an account of meaning. Dretske rightly points out that the mathematical theory of information is really a theory about "signal transmission" with its major application in engineering.[11] For my context that means this theory can only be used to give a comparative, quantitative measure of the amount of information in a report, given a lifeworld context. It cannot be used to give absolute measures of this content, or to give an account of the _meaning_ of a report. What a report says and what it means are two different things.[12] Since newsworthiness is _a_ meaning, the specific consequence of this _caveat_ for my purposes is that

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[11]_Ibid._, p. 40.

[12]Within journalism, this distinction is widely recognized as the distinction between "fact" and "opinion," or description and comment. Again, it is arguable whether such a distinction is absolute in the sense that all description includes interpretation of some sort. Within a particular lifeworld, however, the distinction seems straightforward and non-controversial in the sense that those engaged in communicative action can tell the difference between a statements of fact and opinion. And that is all that is required here.

newsworthiness cannot simply be equated with "amount of information" in a report. As we will see, the newsworthiness of a report depends on factors other than, and in addition to, the information-theoretic amount of information that may be associated with it. With these preliminaries out of the way, I now turn to Dretske's exposition of the basic ideas of the mathematical theory of information.[13]

Information Theory

To arrive at a concept of "amount of information in a report" or **iR(e)**, four ideas of the mathematical theory will have to be considered, namely: (i) surprisal value of events, (ii) information carried by a report about events, (iii) noise and (iv) equivocation. Dretske introduces these basic concepts of information theory by considering an

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[13]The classic work here is by Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver, The Mathematical Theory of Communication, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1949. By way of blanket qualification on this enterprise it should be noted that, though the use of formulas may suggest numerical precision, nothing of the kind is intended. In actual practice, it is the ideas that are intuitively operative in journalistic news judgment, not the numbers that may be suggested here. Nor, as I intend to show, is such precision necessary. As Dretske put it: "...one can use these formulas in the way one would use a piece of string that is not marked off in inches or feet. One can use the string to determine whether A is longer than B without ever determining the length of either A or B." (Dretske, op.cit., p. 54). In my case, one can use the piece of string to determine whether a particular report is newsy or not.

example. In the example, a group of eight employees must select one of their number to perform some task. The selection is left to the employees, who devise some fair method -- flipping a coin, for example[14] -- to select the individual, and then convey this information to the employer by writing the person's name on a piece of paper. Using my notation, what we have here is the following:

(i) an event, e, which is the outcome of the selection process.

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[14] I grant that this choice of "fair method" is loaded, to prepare the way for the application of information theory, which deals in digitalized information. Picking straws, it might be argued, would be just as fair, and I grant the point. The idea that information-content can be transferred and measured in "bits" or yes-no, on-off sequences is intended as a convenience. I suspect, but will not pursue, that it cloaks "ultimate metaphysical" issues. Dretske, for example, grants that his work may be viewed as "an exercise in naturalism -- or, if you prefer, materialistic metaphysics." (op.cit., p. xi) From a physiological point of view, the question of whether the brain processes information digitally (by electrical impulses) or analogically (hormonal activity), seems to be undecided. For an exposition of the view that brain activity is "digitalized" by electronic impulses, see W. Ritchie Russell and A. J. Dewar, Explaining the Brain, London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1975. For a contrary view, which sees brain activity as "analogical", hormonally regulated, see Richard Bergland, The Fabric of Mind, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1985. For a behavioristic account of the psychology of human information processing, see the second chapter, "Human Information Processor" in Stuart K. Card, Thomas P. Moran and Allan Newell, The Psychology of Human-Computer Interaction, Hillsdale: New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1983.

(ii) a statement about this event, p, to the effect that 'X is the person selected.' [In this example, it is just the name of the person, X.]

(iii) the report, R(e), which conveys the statement of the outcome, p, to a recipient, in this case the piece of paper with the name for X sent to the employer.[15]

In the example at hand, it is clear that each employee has a 1/8th chance of being selected, or a 7/8th chance of not being selected. Before the selection is made, there is uncertainty about who will be selected, an uncertainty that will only be removed after the selection is completed. Suppose that the employees divide themselves into two groups of four, flip a coin to eliminate one of those groups. The remaining group of four is then divided into two groups of two, and the process repeated, leaving a final group of Herman and Donald. The third and last toss of the coin decides that Herman will do the job. Now the uncertainty is gone.[16]

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[15]Dretske refers to (iii) above as a signal, and at times uses "signal", "report" and "message" interchangeably to refer to what I have called a report. His concern throughout is the "communication of content", which is, of course, precisely what a "report" is intended to achieve.

[16]Note that the reduction in uncertainty is the same, no matter which one of the employees is selected, i.e. the reduction of uncertainty is a reduction in objective alternatives to the actual outcome or event. This reduction

There is a general way to compute the information associated with a reduction in possibilities, given by 3.1, which expresses the amount of information (in bits) associated with the occurrence of e when it is one of n equally-likely possibilities; 3.2 expresses the same for a particular outcome e, when e and its alternatives are not equally likely.[17] In each case, the logarithm is to the base 2, and the number obtained when replacing variables with numbers and calculating is the information measured in bits:

3.1 $$I(e) = \log_2 n$$

3.2 $$I(e) = \log_2 * [1/p(e)] = -\log_2 p(e)$$

The value given by 3.1 is also called entropy, while that of 3.2 is called surprisal value. It is this latter notion of surprisal value that I wish to exploit as the relevant measure in the determination of "amount of information" in a report.

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is independent of which particular alternative is eventually realized.

[17]These equations, and others later in this chapter, are from the mathematical theory of information as presented by Dretske's in his Knowledge and the Flow of Information. I have changed the symbols to keep it consistent with the ones I introduced earlier.

Inspection of 3.2 indicates an intuitive, though potentially misleading, relevance for journalistic thinking about news. It clearly suggests that the less likely an event, the greater its surprisal value, and hence the more likely its status as a potential news event.[18] It could be said, in fact, that 3.2 expresses the gist of the "Ghee Whiz!" notion of news.[19] However, surprisal value of <u>events</u> is one thing, <u>amount of information</u> in a report, quite another.

To return to the example above, after the selection process is completed the employer receives a piece of paper with the name "Herman" written on it. That memo with the name written on it is the report. The question is: How is the information content of the report to be measured? How can the amount of information in that message be related to the amount of information generated by the event of Herman's selection? What we have is this:

$$I_{(\text{Herman is selected})} = 3 \text{ bits.}$$

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[18]Of course, such inspection also reveals the potential absurdity of a simple-minded identification of surprisal value and news value, for such identification would lead to the view that the more preposterous a report, the greater its news value. More about this in the next chapter.

[19]Park attributes the "Ghee Whiz" notion of news to one of Hearst's editors, Arthur McEwen. (Robert E. Park, "The Natural History of the Newspaper," in Robert Park, <u>et al</u>, <u>The City</u>, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1925, p. 93.) Cf. Mitchell Stephens, <u>Broadcast News</u>, New York: Viking Press, 1980, who says: "Newsworthiness is a measure of wallop." (p. 62)

The problem is to replace the question mark in the expression below

$$iR_{(\text{Herman is selected})} = ?$$

with an appropriate number. The solution of this problem will require addressing the issues of "noise" at the receiving end, and "equivocation" at or by[20] the source of the report.

The name "Herman" is written on a piece of paper and delivered to the boss. After reading the name "Herman" on the paper, the boss now can be said to 'know' that Herman was selected, the uncertainty is eliminated. The "probability" of the statement "Herman is selected" has moved from 1/8th -- at the time before the message is received -- to 1, and so the report in the employer's office also carries three bits of information.[21] But whether or not those three bits in the report are the same three bits of information that were generated by Herman's selection, i.e. are <u>about</u> what happened, is a separate question. As Dretske put it, only in instances of <u>perfect</u> communication

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[20]For Dretske it is equivocation <u>at</u> the source, i.e. meddling with the objective alternatives to the outcome; for me it is more appropriately called equivocation <u>by</u> the source to reflect the fact that most reports judged to be newsworthy come to journalists from sources.

[21]$\text{Log}_2(8)=3$.

can the message to the boss be said to contain the three bits of information <u>about what went on at the source</u>.[22]

In communicating a report about an event **e** from a source to a receiver (in my case a journalist), there are, in fact, four distinct elements that can affect the amount of information being transmitted and thus the value of **iR(e)**. These are: (1) the lifeworld situation, (2) the amount of information generated by events relevant to that lifeworld situation, (3) the amount of information reported by the source, and (4) the amount of information already present at the receiving end. I want to consider each of these elements in turn.

Re (1): The lifeworld situation determines what events or states of affairs are relevant in a particular communication context. For example, in the case of Herman's selection, much other information was generated by the selection process, i.e. much other uncertainty was eliminated, e.g. the various places where people stood or sat while the coin-tossing was going on, or whether they were drinking coffee at the time, or not. In that particular situation, however, all such information is redundant, i.e. such information is irrelevant to the outcome of a selection process to have someone perform a certain task. Determining just what the lifeworld context

[22]Cf. Dretske, <u>op.cit.</u>, pp. 16 - 18.

of a particular situation is, is itself part of the communicative action context. The situation may change, and additional relevant events may be brought into the situation, as Habermas's example about Bavarian construction workers showed. The point is that without some initial understanding of what the lifeworld situation is, there is no way of ruling out irrelevant events, and hence no way of excluding redundant information. Of course, it is also the case that for many, if not most, contexts of communicative action, this initial lifeworld situation is self-evident.[23]

Re (2): The amount of information generated by the relevant events is determined by 3.2. This surprisal value represents the reduction in objective alternatives to the relevant events that occur. In the case of Herman's selection in the original example, that was a reduction from eight possibilities to one, and equalled three bits of information. Suppose, however, that there was a prior decision among employees that in case Shirley, Herman's pregnant wife, was selected, Herman would do the job. Now, the objective chance of Herman being selected has doubled, from 1/8th to 2/8th, and hence the amount of information

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[23]In fact, the reporting of events that show that a particular lifeworld situation, e.g. GATT talks, are also relevant to some other lifeworld situation, e.g. t.e survival of family farms on Canada's prairies, is another way in which this point can be illustrated. This underscores, once again, that the values for "amount of information in a report" are strictly relative to lifeworld contexts of communication.

associated with the selection of Herman is less than three, to wit: $I(e) = -\log_2(\frac{1}{4}) = 2$ bits.[24] In this case, the "equivocation" at the source to the effect that "Herman will do the job if either Herman or Shirley is selected" affects the amount of information associated with the outcome of the selection process. It is not redundant information.

Re (3): Equivocation is most directly relevant, however, to the amount of information in the report. A source need not declare that the reported event -- Herman's selection -- was affected by equivocation. The equivocation represents information that is lost, and thus affects the amount of information in a report.[25] It should be evident from the restrictions on the context of communicative action that a recipient of a report in general, and a journalist in particular, has no _a priori_ way of knowing whether or not information in a report is affected by equivocation surrounding the event or events reported. Accordingly, the

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[24]In the original case, the _average_ amount of information associated with the selection of any individual was 3 bits; in the example of the deal about Herman and Shirley, the average amount of information associated with the selection of any individual is 2.75 bits. For the calculation see Dretske, _op.cit._, p. 14.

[25]While I have already ruled out deliberate equivocation by the source, it is useful here to note that when such deliberate equivocation is uncovered -- e.g. in political patronage appointments, or instances of nepotism, or bribery in the award of contracts -- such uncovered instances of "meddling" or equivocation are themselves judged to be newsworthy.

appropriate mathematical formula for calculating the amount of information in a report, which simply subtracts the average amount of equivocation of possible outcome from the amount of information generated by the actual outcome,[26] will not be helpful. Instead I will be using a "source reliability factor", to be discussed below.

Re (4): Just as there is redundant information generated by events, so too there is, generally, pre-existing information at the receiving end or noise that may affect the communication of the content. Three possibilities are of interest here:

(a) Noise has no effect on content. The information already at the receiving end (noise) does not affect the transmission of content, the message gets through. For example, it makes no difference to the content, and hence amount of information transmitted, whether the name "Herman" is written on green or white paper, or whether this report is placed on the right, or left corner of the employer's desk, etc. Of course, if the memo from the employees gets lost in the stack of papers on the employer's desk, that would be an instance of the next case.

(b) Noise disturbs the content. For example, the employee bearing the message that Herman is selected may

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[26]To wit, using my symbols, iR(e) = I(e) - E(e) and the value of E(e) is calculated using formulas given and discussed by Dretske, op.cit., pp. 24 - 25, the details of which are not relevant to my case.

find the employer in his office, behind a desk loaded with memoes and reports, with a newscast on the radio in the background, and a ringing telephone. "We picked Herman," the employee says. "What?," the employer responds. "You picked Hermine?" Here noise has affected the amount of information transmitted, for the received report of Hermine's selection would carry 2.75 bits of information; that of Herman's selection, 2 bits.[27] It is important to recognize that in such cases noise contributes to the equivocation of the report. In this case, however, the equivocation does not originate at the source, but at the receiver.[28]

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[27]Cf. note 24, above.

[28]Dretske's example here is helpful. "In actual concrete situations an increase in the noise (the ordinary snap-crackle-pop sort of noise) not only will increase N[my C] (the noise in the technical sense) but also will obscure part of the received signal, thereby ... <u>increasing the equivocation</u>....For example, the radio report "(a)There will be rain on Sunday (snap, crackle, pop, hiss) has a good deal of noise, but the noise does not interfere with any part of the message being transmitted from the radio studio....Contrast (a) with (b): (b) There will be rain on (snap)-nday (crackle, pop, hiss) Here we have the same amount of noise, but the amount of transmitted information is reduced because the noise increases the equivocation. The equivocation is increased because part of the signal from the broadcasting studio is obscured, leaving an ambiguous (equivocal) message. Given the events occurring at <u>r</u>, the forecast could have been either rain on <u>Sunday</u> or rain on <u>Monday</u>. The fact that the announcer said "Sunday" is information that is <u>lost</u>, and the amount of information lost is what is measured by the equivocation. If noise increases the amount of lost information, it reduces the amount of information transmitted; but if it leaves the equivocation unaffected, [the amount of information transmitted] remains the same." (Dretske, <u>op.cit.</u>, p. 20-21)

(c) The third, and final possibility where pre-existing information can affect the amount of information being transmitted occurs when the receiver already knows the content of the report. For example, the employee bearing the tidings of Herman's selection is told by the employer that, "Yes, I know, Herman just called to tell me." In that case, the report carries no information. The employer already knew.[29]

There are, then, three related amounts of information to be considered in a context of communication: **I(e)**, or amount of information generated by events relevant to the lifeworld context of communicative action; **iR(e)**, or amount of information content reported, and $\mathbf{iR(e)}_j$, of amount of information actually received.[30] How can these values be used to determine the amount of information in reports?

It would appear that there are two possible candidates for determining this value, namely, either

3.3 $$iR(e)_j = I(e)$$

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[29]I have left out of consideration, because it is not particularly relevant to my argument, the possibility that a report be in a language the recipient cannot understand, or written, typed in a such a way as to be illegible.

[30]I have used the subscript "j" here to indicate that it is primarily the source-journalist relationship that is of interest here.

or,

3.4 $$iR(e) = I(e)$$

The next step in my argument is to rule out 3.3 and amend 3.4 to get this first approximation of "amount of information in a report." I will then use this notion to define the promised "core concept" of news.

Despite the fact that the value for $iR(e)_j$ reflects the journalistic context -- it is the amount of information in a report as that report is received by a journalist -- 3.3 clearly will not do, not even as a first approximation of the amount of information in a report. For one thing, there is no <u>prima facie</u> reason to suppose that what a journalist takes a report to say has anything to do with what it actually says, i.e. with the amount of information it contains relative to the objective reduction in alternatives to e. The expression $iR(e)_j$ reflects the impact of noise on the amount of information transmitted, and this noise could be considerable. For example, noise in phone lines, garbled wire reports due to thunderstorms, computer failures, and similar practical problems could contribute to the value of $iR(e)_j$ being far less, or far more, that what is generated by the occurrence of e.

In addition to these practical contingencies, the journalist's perception of the amount of information in a report could be distorted because of incompetence, or lack of professionalism. It would seem, in fact, that one of the major sources of "noise" in source-journalist communications consists of the journalist's own preconceptions, political convictions, biases and personal convictions.[31]

Now, while it is undoubtedly the case that such practical and professional problems will affect the news judgments proper that journalists make, it seems clear that such difficulties have little to do with the rationality of those judgments. A relevant analogy here is the distinction between validity and soundness in deductive arguments. A logically valid and in that sense "rational" argument may have a false conclusion, i.e. be unsound, because one or more of the premises is false. Similarly here, a news judgment may be mistaken not because the journalist made an error in judgment, but because of practical contingencies or lack of professionalism. Since my concern is with the rationality of journalistic news judgment proper, I can safely ignore these practical and professional problems.[32]

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[31]Cf. S. Robert Lichter, Stanley Rothman and Linda S. Richter, The Media Elite. Bethesda, Maryland: Adler & Adler, 1986, who argues that these preconceptions among the "elite" journalists tend to be leftist. For a similar type of argument, with a contrary conclusion, see Robert Cirino, Don't Blame the People: How the News edia Use Bias, Distortion, and Censorship to Manipulate Public Opinion, Los Angeles: Diversity Press, 1971.

[32]This means that, in effect, I am ignoring noise as a relevant factor in the determination of the amount of information in a report. In the "core concept" of news,

This leaves us with 3.4, according to which the amount of information in a report simply equals the amount of information generated by the occurrence of e, the surprisal value of e. Given what was said above about equivocation, however, allowance must be made for the potential effect of equivocation by a source on the amount of information reported. There are two possibilities here, namely <u>unwitting equivocation</u> and <u>deliberate equivocation</u>. To make allowances for both these sources of equivocation, I would like to amend 3.4 by introducing a "source reliability factor" or μ, as follows:

3.41 $$iR(e) = \mu * I(e),$$

which says that the amount of information in a report (measured in bits) is equal to the product of this source reliability factor and the amount of information generated by the occurrence of e.[33]

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however, the problem of "noise" will have to be reconsidered. It can also be argued that <u>failure to recognize</u> the existence of practical and professional difficulties <u>is</u> an error in judgment. I agree, but add that it is a <u>different</u> kind of error from "error in news judgment."

[33]Two points need mentioning here, though they will be expanded later. First, 3.41 no longer looks like anything to be found in the mathematical theory of information or like anything to be discovered in Dretske. It is an invention, a convenient fiction. Second, the source reliability factor here is, strictly speaking, a "journalistic variable" that has no bearing whatever on the

This source reliability factor will take on different values, depending on the context and the information content of the report. These values, which would be based on a journalist's previous experience with the source or reflect common sense understanding of the authority, expertise, interests and motivation of the source, could range from 1 for "totally reliable" or "no equivocation" to 0 for "totally unreliable" or "all possible manner of equivocation" or "evidence of deliberate equivocation" depending on the nature of the report and the source in question. If a source is generally reliable, the amount of information generated equals the surprisal value of the information content; if somewhat reliable, it would be correspondingly less, and if the source is a known liar, i.e. $\mu = 0$, then too the value of **iR(e)** = 0.[34]

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amount of information generated by an event. The idea is to get some numerical, information-based value. If it helps, the idea is to make **iR(e)** the "core news value", something that will vary directly with certain professional conventions, to be represented by Greek letters, and a "core information measure" or amount of information associated with a report about an event or state of affairs. But the argument will make that clear.

[34]One of the most recent, systematic and comprehensive study of news sources is the Canadian work by Richard V. Ericson, Patricia M. Baranek and Janet B. Chan, Negotiating Control: A Study of News Sources, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987. Although they do not mention Habermas, their study of journalists and their sources reveals the give-and-take of a "struggle over signs" (p. 17) in communicative action in this relationship. The authors note that "News is a product of transactions between journalists and their sources. The primary source of reality for news is not what is displayed or what happens in the real world."

While 3.41 gives us a "first approximation" of what we will take to be the "amount of information in a report," it is not without problems. The main problem emerges when 3.41 is expanded to make the role of the notion of "surprisal value" explicit, thus:

$$3.411 \qquad iR(e) = \mu*(-\log_2*[p(e)])$$

which shows that the determination of I(e) still requires the calculation of the objective surprisal value, i.e. the measure of the objective reduction in uncertainty that occurred when e happened. To be able to use 3.411, therefore, journalists need some way of determining what the actual amount of information generated by the occurrence of e is. But that clearly will not do for the context of journalistic news judgment. The determination of I(e) presupposes objective knowledge about the alternatives to e, for the probability measure here refers to objective or

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(p. 377) Or, again, "News...solidifies the knowledge structure of society." (p. 398) Habermas's way of putting the matter in terms of "symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld" seems, to me, to be much less pretentious. Cf. on this topic the already-referred-to study by Leon Sigal, Reporters and Officials. In a more recent work, Leon V. Sigal, "Sources Make the News," (Reading the News, Robert Karl Manoff and Michael Schudson, eds, New York: Random House, 1986.), Sigal argues that "News is not what happens, but what someone says has happened or will happen....Even when reporters are in a position to cover an event directly, they feel bound by convention to record what sources say has occurred rather than to venture, at least explicitly, their own version of the event." (p. 15) empirical probabilities. Journalists cannot be expected to have such knowledge for many of the "expert" reports they judge to be newsworthy.

To get around this difficulty, the probability p(e) in 3.411 could be interpreted as a subjective probability, a measure of the state of a journalist's belief or disbelief concerning the information content of the report. But that is _not_ the kind of probability postulated by the mathematical theory of information, which deals in empirical or _objective_ probabilities.[35] Still, since 3.411 is only intended to produce a "first approximation" of the amount of information in a report -- and no longer looks like anything to be found in information theory at any rate -- producing a number that is qualified by μ, a journalistic appraisal of source reliability, it seems not unreasonable to allow this move to a subjective probability.

To make this move to subjective probability explicit, I will rewrite 3.411 as

3.5 $$iR(e) = \mu * \{-\log_2[p_s(e)]\}$$

[35]Cf. Dretske, _op.cit_., p. 55, where, commenting on the idea that the employer _believed_ he had 3 bits of information when the original message was lost, and another accidentally correct, message substituted, notes that the employer "was simply wrong. How much information a signal carries is _not_ a function of of how much information the recipient thinks it carries. It is a function, simply, of the actual possibilities that exist at _s_...."

Before commenting on 3.5, I would like to add one further factor of journalistic relevance to the idea of "amount of information" in a report. This factor is what I will call the "community-impact factor" (ß) and is meant to reflect the relative impact of the information content on persons and situations in the lifeworld.

The community-impact factor combines the journalism textbooks' news values of "intensity" and "extensity". These "news values" could be empirically measured through polling and surveys, i.e. they represent an objective factor. As I will construe it, the community impact factor reflects both how many and how much people or situations will be affected by the information content of a report. Computing an appropriate scale of values for ß is not difficult, and need not detain us here.[36] Since the value of **iR(e)** varies directly with this community-impact factor, 3.5 can be readily amended as follows:

$$3.51 \qquad iR(e) = \beta*\mu*\{-\log_2[p_s(e)]\}$$

[36]One way to compute the value of ß by first deciding whether the content affects many or a few, based on a scale ranging from 1 to 5, for, "very few individuals" to "all individuals" and appropriate intermediate numbers. We then multiply this number by another number, picked from an intensity ranking, e.g. one ranging from 1 to 3, for low, medium and high levels of impact. Thus, the ß-value of a reported income tax increase would equal 15, and the ß-value of a human-interest story about a lottery winner could be set at 3. The lowest ß-value of any report would be 1, a report that affects only a few people, and that in a minor way.

I will refer to the value of **iR(e)** as determined by 3.51 as the "core news value" of a report and will define the "core concept of news" in terms of it. The expression **($\beta * \mu$)** can be thought of as the "professional" or "conventional" variable for its value will reflect the journalistic appreciation of the importance, interest, and consequence of a report's information content. The expression **$-\log_2[p_s(e)]$** stands for the journalist's appraisal of the surprisal value of the event, and I will call that the "core information measure." What 3.51 expresses in information-theoretic terms, therefore, is basically quite intuitive. The news value of a report varies with the journalistic assessment of its information value. I want to underline two aspects of this concept of the core news value of a report before using this concept to define the "core concept" of news, or newsworthiness.

The first point that needs to be made is to underscore the fact that the core news value of a report is a subjective value. But it is not merely subjective, as the previously-rejected candidate, **$iR(e)_j$** was. The latter value was determined by the prevalence of noise; the core news value of a report represents a professionally-justified value, i.e. it is one about which most journalists would, under normal circumstances, agree. The numerical value of iR(e) by 3.51 represents the professionally-considered assessment of a report, not a knee-jerk reaction.[37]

Professional agreement, however, as was shown in Chapter 2 is insufficient as a validity test of news judgments proper. So we need something more. The concept of the core news value of a report still does not give us that something more. The core news value, as defined by 3.51 above, cannot rule out as invalid the possibly high, indeed, very-high core news value of reports about mermaids and a resurrected JFK. The reason we cannot rule out such high values is because we were forced to resort to subjective probabilities, and to assign a subjective probability of zero to mermaid-events would, in the absence of sound arguments to the contrary, be either arbitrary or dogmatic. But the closer to zero we set the subjective probability, the greater the number of bits of information generated by mermaid-events.[38]

This very shortcoming of the core news value suggests its resolution: Restore the objective or empirical probability interpretation. Given, however, that this

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[37]I grant, of course, that most experienced journalists are able to assess the news value of a report without going through anything resembling a calculation as per 3.51.

[38]I suppose it could be argued, but I would reject the argument on grounds of dogmatism, that any source of such tales is a liar, hence $\mu = 0$, hence too such reports have no core news value. That is, unless there is evidence that the source is lying, a journalist cannot presume to know "better," unless, of course, the journalist is an expert.

objective probability interpretation was dropped for the good reason that journalists cannot be presumed to have knowledge of objective alternatives to what did, in fact, take place, such a return to objective probability poses problems. I will deal with those problems in the next chapter.

It is instructive, meanwhile, to notice the conditions under which the core news value = 0. One of those conditions was already mentioned, namely, when the source of the information content is a known liar, i.e. "totally unreliable" source with respect to a particular report. The other condition under which **iR(e)** = 0, is when the information content is "old news." In such cases the probability of **e** is 1, i.e. **e** is known to have occurred before the receipt of the report of its occurrence.[39] Since, $\log_2(1) = 0$, the right side of 3.51 likewise becomes 0.

In addition to capturing these intuitions about what makes or does not make news, the core news value also meshes with the idea of the "newsday," a concept introduced earlier.[40] The notion of the newsday accounts, in part,

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[39]For someone trying to win the "News Tip of the Week" award, an inducement used by many radio stations to get listeners to call in when they "see" news happening, such prior knowledge would constitute "noise", as previously discussed.

[40]Introduction, note 13, p. 7.

for the uniqueness of the journalistic news judgment, for only journalists have access to it. We can now think of the newsday as the set of reports ranked according to their core news value.[41] Thus, the top story of the day would have the highest core news value; the fillers, the least.[42]

Within the context of a newsday and relative to the lifeworld, I can now offer the promised "core concept of news" in terms of a formal definition, as follows: [43]

A report **R(e)** is newsworthy, if and only if

(i) its core information measure is greater than 0, i.e. $p_s(e) < 1$, and $\mu > 0$],

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[41]This representation, I need hardly add, vastly oversimplies actual practice. Newspapers have several departments, each headed by an editor, each with a "newsday" pertinent to the department. But I think the idea is clear enough.

[42]The role of the assignment editor serves as a useful example here. The job of the assignment editor is to assign stories to available reporters. Obviously, the number of reports that can be acted on will be limited by the number of reporters available, and usually the number of reports exceeds the number of available reporters. I suggest that a ranking of these reports in terms of something like the core news value is what guides the editor in making the assignments to reporters, reports judged to be most newsworthy get "covered", those less newsy are not.

[43]While I couch the core concept of news in formal terms, no closed definition is intended. As a "reflective clarification", the core concept of news is designed to elucidate its epistemic character, i.e. to use Hyland's words here, "to clarify our experience" of news, not to capture its essence as a commodity. Cf. Hyland, The Question of Play, p. 49 - 50.

(ii) The core news value of **iR(e)** is equal to or greater than the core news value of the lowest-ranked report in the newsday,

(iii) The core news value of any other report about **e**, **iR'(e)** is less than **iR(e)**, and

(iv) It is not the case that **R(e)** is already a member of the newsday.

Given the previous discussion, these conditions are straightforward. Condition (i) requires that the report contain fresh or timely information -- and any positive value for the core information measure $[-\log_2[p_s(e)]$ will guarantee this. Condition (ii) requires the core news value of the report to be at least equal to the core information value of the lowest-ranked report in the newsday. The third condition allows for the possibility that there may be more than one report about the same event, and picks the report with the greatest core information value.[44] The final

[44]An example here might be "events" such as the Gulf War, which would generate many reports on any given day. Condition (iii) stipulates that for a Gulf War report to qualify as newsworthy, it cannot already be part of some other report dealing with that war. For example, competing wire services may use different leads, and include the competition's lead further down in their own stories.

condition ensures that there will be no duplication of reports within the newsday, no old news, in fact.

The next, and final step in this dissertation's overall argument is to specify the "assertoric validity condition" for this core concept of newsworthiness or news. It should be apparent, that the "validity problem" centres around condition (i), the core information measure of a report. In the next chapter, I will argue for a pragmatic information measure, based on the objective, or frequentist interpretation of probability. I will then show that this pragmatic information measure yields the required validity condition for journalistic news judgments proper.

CHAPTER IV

The Assertoric Validity Condition

In this chapter I will develop the "assertoric validity condition" for journalistic news judgment proper. In a nutshell, that condition is that a news judgment proper is assertorically valid if (a) it meets the conditions of the core concept of news, developed in the previous chapter, and (b) its core information measure equals (approximately) something I will call its pragmatic information measure.

This pragmatic information measure, to be developed below, is like the core information measure except that the probability measure used to determine the surprisal value of the information content of a report is an objective measure, not a subjective one. The pragmatic information measure of a report, which I will symbolize as $\mathbf{iR}(\mathbf{e})_{pim}$ is simply the surprisal value of **e**, or

4.1 $$iR(\bullet)_{pi\blacksquare} = I(\bullet) = -\log_2[p_o(\bullet)]$$

where $p_o(\bullet)$ refers to the objective prior probability of $\bullet$, i.e. the probability of $\bullet$'s occurrence prior to its actual occurrence as reported by $R(\bullet)$. Most of my arguments in this chapter will be devoted to showing that $iR(\bullet)_{pi\blacksquare}$ is an intelligible notion.[1]

The purpose of this pragmatic information measure in the assertoric validity condition is to allow a journalist to "redeem" the objective validity claim made through the illocutionary force of the published news narrative. The objective claim is that the reported state of affairs is newsworthy. To redeem such a claim in a context of communicative action requires, as Habermas has argued, that a journalist be prepared to give those reasons.[2] While in many instances such reasoning need go no further than the various conditions specified in the core concept of news --

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[1]Which touch on complex, current issues in often highly-technical discussions in philosophy of science, mainly those dealing with statistical explanations. My main reference to these issues has been Wesley C. Salmon, Scientific Explanation and the Causal Structure of the World, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984.

[2]That is, journalists need not use those reasons in arriving at the news judgment proper. The "nose for news" may do just fine in most cases. The point is that a journalist accepts as legitimate the demand for such reasons -- an acceptance that is entailed by the Habermasian notion of communicative action -- and must be prepared, in principle, to produce them.

such as citing the appropriate journalistic conventions -- the mermaid tale showed that this core concept is not enough. By allowing subjective probability measures, the core concept of news cannot guarantee that the newsy information in news narratives "point to" truth.[3] The introduction of the pragmatic information measure, then, is intended as an objective constraint on the subjective core information measure to ensure that journalistic assessments of the unusual continue to "point to truth" and remain true to the earth.

Now, if we contrast these two notions, the core information measure and the pragmatic information measure, the _only_ difference between them relates to the _interpretation of the concept of probability_ to be used in determining the surprisal value of the event reported. Objective probability was dropped from what I called the core concept of news because journalists cannot be expected to have independent knowledge, i.e. non-source based knowledge, of objective alternatives to the events reported. If this reason still stands, as I submit it does, how can I now propose to reintroduce objective probability by means of this pragmatic information measure, as given by 4.1?

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[3]And it is this general requirement on the information content, as described in the previous chapter, that was _not_ captured by the core definition of news.

My answer is that the pragmatic information measure is to be the test of the the core information measure. It is a test of the reasonableness of journalistic news judgments proper, in much the same way that modus ponens and modus tollens are valid forms of argument.[4] We can also think of the pragmatic information measure as the "reflective" or "critical" version of the core information measure. While it will still be the case that journalists cannot be expected to know everything about the objective alternatives to e, it is to be expected that, upon reflection, they are willing to grant that, (a) they had certain beliefs, and possibly some knowledge, about those alternatives, and (b) they are, in principle, ready to accept whatever evidence can be produced concerning those alternatives to test those beliefs, and hence the subjective probability values based on them.

To develop the pragmatic information measure as defined by 4.1, I will need to show that the probability measure $p_o(e)$ can be interpreted as an objective probability. I will argue, borrowing heavily from Salmon's 1967 Foundations

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[4]The rules of logic, such as modus ponens, apply to the linguistic form of arguments; the assertoric validity condition to contexts of communicative action. And just as a politician need not know logic to be able to reason correctly, so too journalists need not know the assertoric validity condition to make valid news judgments. But they do need it, and hence should in principle be able to use it, when defending their news judgments proper as valid news claims, something that goes beyond the factuality of the propositional content of their narratives.

of Scientific Inference[5], that the appropriate concept of probability here is the frequency interpretation. This objective concept takes probability as the mathematical limit of the frequency of an event's occurrence "in the long run". I will then try to show that this frequency concept of probability can be used as intended and as specified by 4.1 to individual events within and against the context of a communicatively-structured lifeworld. It is primarily because 4.1 is intended for that context that I have called it the pragmatic information measure.[6]

In his 1967 work Salmon touches on a problem analogous to the difficulty posed by the mermaid case or supermarket tabloid journalism. His argument deals with the reasonableness of dismissing 'crackpot' scientific "theories" in much the same way that I want to be able to say that it is an invalid news judgment proper to claim that

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[5]Wesley C. Salmon, The Foundations of Scientific Inference, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1967. The author, while a student at the University of Pittsburgh in 1968-69, attended some of Prof. Salmon's lectures, including one that dealt specifically with the difficulty of "scientific reasonableness" in failing to consider "crackpot science" seriously.

[6]The pragmatism in the "pragmatic information measure" refers to its application in the context of communicative action, as distinct from more systematic or theoretical inquiries or applications. It is, in other words, not a concept that engineers interested in signal transmission will find useful. It is also "pragmatic" in the sense that it will require some "practical" decisions in determining reference classes for arriving at probability measures. But these considerations anticipate issues to be raised in the arguments to come.

a sailor's story about being rescued by mermaids is newsworthy.[7] While there are obvious differences in our respective subject matters and their contexts, Salmon's arguments for the appropriateness of the frequentist interpretation of probability in scientific inference and his plausibility constraints on scientific hypotheses bear directly on the problem at hand.

Problem of Probability

The philosophical problem of probability, according to Salmon, is the problem of interpreting the mathematical probability calculus in a way which does "justice to the important applications of probability in empirical science and in practical affairs."[8] Philosophers have advanced several different interpretations of the notion of probability. Salmon proposes three "criteria of adequacy" any interpretation of probability must meet. Those criteria are, (1) admissibility, (2) ascertainability, and (3) applicability.

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[7] I should stress that this is only a peripheral matter in Salmon's book. He particularly mentions such 'theories' as dianetics and "Velikovski's notorious book, Worlds in Collision. This so-called theory, designed to explain certain alleged events as related in the Old Testament, entails the falsity of virtually all of modern physics." (Salmon, op.cit., p. 125.)

[8] Salmon, op.cit., p. 63.

By admissibility Salmon means that a philosophical theory of probability must satisfy the axioms and theorems of the uninterpreted probability calculus.[9] I will take this to be an obvious, formal, constraint on the interpretation of probability.[10] The criterion of ascertainability specifies that "in principle, at least, we can ascertain values of probabilities."[11] The third criterion, applicability, refers to the necessity of a concept of probability to be such that it can serve as a

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[9]The specifics need not concern us here, except to note that this mathematical probability calculus is a complete and consistent system of axioms and theorems dealing with probability.

[10] "This criterion is not merely an expression of admiration of mathematics," Salmon writes, "important reasons can be given for insisting upon it. One reason is that the mathematical calculus has been developed with great care and precision over a long period of time and with due regard for a vast range of practical and theoretical problems. It would be rash indeed to conclude on the basis of casual reflection that the mathematical theory is likely to be wrong or irrelevant in relation to potential applications. ....Another reason for insisting upon admissibility is a consequence of the fact that violations of the formal properties of calculus lead to incoherent betting systems." (Op.cit., pp. 63-64) I submit that both these reasons are also good reasons for insisting on the admissibility criterion for any interpretation of probability in the notion of surprisal value.

[11]Salmon, op.cit., p. 64. This was easy enough, when, in the previous chapter, I considered the case of Herman's selection to perform some task. The prior probability of his selection was 1/8th. In other cases it is not so easy, e.g. what prior probability could have been assigned to the assassination of John F. Kennedy? Or the space shuttle Challenger disaster?

practical "guide to life" in specific situations or single cases.[12]

For the determination of $p_0(e)$ in 4.1, the applicability criterion will pose most of the problems. Since the pragmatic information measure deals with the surprisal value of a single, unique event, it requires a value for the prior probability of this specific event. Our interpretation of probability, therefore, must permit a way of assigning probability values to specific events. This means facing what Salmon termed the "fundamental philosophical difficulty" of interpreting probability, namely, "to satisfy simultaneously the criteria of ascertainability and applicability." [13]

Of the five interpretations of probability Salmon discusses -- classical, subjective, logical, personalist and objective or limit of frequency-in-the-long-run -- three can be dismissed rather quickly as possible candidates for the interpretation of $p_0(e)$ in 4.1. The classical and subjective interpretations fail the admissibility test, i.e.

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[12] Salmon, op. cit., p. 64, i.e. the interpretation of probability should have "practical predictive significance". Salmon's primary interest in this condition is its applicability to problems in philosophy of science. We need not get into those aspects of his discussion here. Note, however, how these issues in philosophy of science can now be seen to be at least peripherally relevant to a philosophical understanding of issues in journalism.

[13] Salmon, op.cit., p. 65.

lead to contradictions or incoherent betting situations.[14] The personalist view is like the subjective one in that probability is seen as a measure of one's state of belief. It is unlike the subjective interpretation, however, in that it accepts the constraint of the probability calculus. Only the initial probabilities, in any given situation, are purely subjective; thereafter, the constraints of the calculus apply. Salmon rightly objects that this position still "tolerates <u>any kind</u> of inference from the observed to the unobserved. This amounts to an abdication of probability from the role of 'a guide to life'."[15] By the same argument, the personalist interpretation also fails to guarantee, i.e. cannot function as the desired test, that news judgments proper "point to" truth, or what is the case.

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[14] Salmon, <u>op. cit.</u>, pp. 65 - 68. The classical view interprets probability as the ratio of favorable to equally possible cases. This is patently circular if "equally possible" is interpreted as meaning "equally probable", as Salmon points out. If, on the other hand, some other notion of "equally possible" is used, such as the <u>principle of indifference</u>, there is no reason to prefer one possibility over another, then it leads to contradiction or equivocal probability assignments. The subjective interpretation -- probability as a measure of degree of belief -- fails to yield measures that coincide with those of the probability calculus and leads to incoherent betting situations.

[15] Salmon, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. 82. While I agree with Salmon that the personalist, or Bayesian, approach to probability has desirable features -- most notably its sensitivity to evidence as a corrective on degree of belief -- it should be evident that the personalist interepretation of probability would sanction as "n wsy" any report whatever, no matter how absurd. It could not <u>rule out</u> mermaid reports on the grounds that there are no mermaids.

With the rejection of the classical, subjective and personalist interpretations as acceptable candidates for the interpretation of $p_0(e)$ in 4.1, I am left with the logical and frequency interpretations.

Logical Probability

The basic idea of the logical interpretation is that probabilities be equally distributed in some a priori manner over logically exhaustive ways to describe the world.[16] Hintikka shows, however, that the logical interpretation would face serious difficulties in meeting Salmon's applicability criterion.[17] No matter which way one picks

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[16]Though the arguments usually refer to very small "worlds", such as differently-coloured balls drawn from an urn, and thus would make it practically difficult to see the connection to the complex "world" of journalism, it is the principle that matters. For a useful and clear discussion of the basic ideas here, including Carnap's state and structure descriptions, see Brian Skyrms, Choice and Chance: An Introduction to Inductive Logic. Second Edition. Encino and Belmont, Calif.: Dickenson Publishing Company, Inc., 1975, pp. 206 -210.

[17]The technical details of these arguments need not detain us. Epistemic applications of information theory are also to be found in the philosophy of science. Cf. here Salmon's sympathetic discussion of an information-theoretic interpretation of scientific explanation in his Scientific Explanation and the Causal Structure of the World, pp. 97 - 101, though he qualifies that by stressing the importance of including a "serviceable concept of probabilistic causality." (The interpretation he discusses is by James G. Greeno, "Evaluation of Statistical Hypotheses Using Information Transmitted," Philosophy of Science, Vol. 37 (1970), pp. 279 - 293. For another, though earlier, discussion of similar issues see Jaakko Hintikka, "On Semantic Information," Physics, Logic, and History; Based on

to describe the world or how one partitions it for purposes of distributing a priori probability assignments, it either turns out to be impossible to learn from experience or that all generalizations other than logical truths are false.

Salmon's discussion of Carnap's theories of logical probability lead him to conclude that no matter what techical developments are employed to save the theory, the fact will remain that "statements of logical probability ....are statements whose truth of falsity are results of definitions and pure logic alone; they have no synthetic or factual content....The question is: How can statements that say nothing about any matters of fact serve as 'a guide for life?'"[18] While Salmon's argument goes beyond merely posing that rhetorical question, his final assessment and

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First International Colloquium Held at University of Denver, May 16 - 20, 1966, Wolfgang Yourgrau and Allan D. Breck, eds. New York: Plenum Press, 1970. Hintikka, like Salmon, deals specifically with Carnap and Popper. Dretske accepts the frequency interpretation, though it is an incidental issue to his main argument. He is, as was noted before, primarily interested in physical, i.e. perceptual signals. "No signal can rule out all possibilities if possibilities are identified with what is consistently imaginable. No signal, for instance, can eliminate the possibility that it was generated, not by the normal means, but by some freak cosmic accident, by a deceptive demon, or by supernatural intervention. If such contingencies are counted as genuine possibilities, then every signal is equivocal." (Dretske, op.cit., p. 130.)

[18]Salmon, op.cit., pp. 75-76. His italics.

rejection of the logical interpretation is categorical.[19] A theory of probability that cannot serve as a "guide for life" is not likely to yield a useful test for the validity of a news judgment either.

Frequency Interpretation

The frequency interpretation identifies probability with the mathematical limit of relative frequency in the long run. As a primarily descriptive or objective concept of probability, its adoption for the determination of $p_o(\bullet)$ is especially suited to the mathematical theory of information which also uses the frequency concept. It will not be necessary, for our purposes, to go into the mathematical concept of the limit.[20] It suffices, for my purposes, to simply accept that this limit of the relative frequency in the long run can be taken as the probability. We can also accept that this frequentist account meets the

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[19]"This theory provides no reason for supposing any connection whatever between what is probable and what happens often. It seems to provide no basis for expecting the probable in preference to the improbable. In my opinion, it lacks predictive content and thus fails to qualify as a "guide for life." (Salmon, op.cit., p. 79.)

[20]The idea of the limit is most readily explained by taking a series of coin tosses, and determining the relative frequencies with which heads or tails come up. As the series, i.e. number of tosses, increases, the relative frequencies can be seen to approach ½.

criterion of admissibility, i.e. that it satisfies the axioms and theorems of the probability calculus.[21]

As an interpretation of probability, the concept of the limit poses problems at the level of applicability and ascertainability.[22] The ascertainability problem has two, related components. The first difficulty is justifying the move from observed frequencies in finite samples to the "mathematical limit" of the series "in the long run," a conundrum that is known in philosophy as "Hume's problem" or Hume's problem of induction.[23] The second difficulty is that there appear to be an infinite number of values for such limits based on finite samples because some

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[21]Salmon says the proof is "easy" and refers the reader to the proof in Hans Reichenbach, The Theory of Probability, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1949, sec. 18.

[22]For Salmon, the main problem with the theory lies at the level of ascertainability. Salmon suggests that given the empirical basis of the frequentist interpretation, it has at least some prima facie merit over the logical interpretation in the area of applicability. The problem, at this level, is how to get at probabilities of individual events. More about that later.

[23]In a nutshell, Hume's problem of induction is that there is no logical ground for holding that statistical uniformities observed in the past will continue to hold in the future. As a foundational problem in the philosophy of science, Hume's problem, or the problem of the justification of induction, has spawned an enormous literature and, when taken in conjunction with his analysis of causality, even entire traditions within philosophical thought itself, beginning, of course, with Immanuel Kant's famous first Critique, the Critique of Pure Reason. This is obviously not the place to enter into an assessment of these complex issues.

mathematical rule yielding that value as the limit can always be formulated. "Given a sample of <u>any</u> finite size, and given <u>any</u> observed frequency in that sample, you may select <u>any</u> number from zero to one inclusive, and there is some asymptotic rule [i.e a rule that converges on the limit of the observed frequency] to sanction the inference that this arbitrarily chosen number is the probability."[24]

The first point to be made here is that for the context of communicative action, the question of the justification of induction need not detain us. This difficulty can be passed over because, as even Hume himself would readily grant,[25] the issue of justifying induction -- the ascertainability problem -- does not even arise within contexts of communicative action and its rationality. The communication-theoretic lifeworld, within and against which all such action takes place <u>presupposes</u> this very principle. It presupposes it not as a theoretical, foundational principle -- for there are no such principles for the

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[24]Salmon, <u>op.cit.</u>, p. 88.

[25]Cf. David Hume, <u>An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding</u>, Charles W. Hendel, ed. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc. (Liberal Arts Press), 1955, p. 55, where, commenting on his own skeptical results, Hume says: "Nor need we fear that this philosophy [his], while it endeavors to limit our inquiries to common life, should ever undermine the reasonings of common life and carry its doubts so far as to destroy all action as well as speculation. Nature will always maintain her rights and prevail in the end over any abstract reasoning whatsoever."

lifeworld, which is an historically-evolving cultural context for all communicative action -- but as a pragmatic, background belief in the uniformity of nature.

Given then that the first part of the ascertainability problem can be considered solved for contexts of communicative action, a major potential obstacle for adapting the frequency interpretation of probability for the pragmatic information measure is resolved. Furthermore, this same argument has an immediate, and significant, consequence. It is this: Given that the lifeworld context presupposes a uniformity of nature, the universal and statistical generalizations that pertain to specific "situations" of communicative action must be accepted as relevant. This is a pragmatic "must be", for there is no logical necessity at work here; lifeworld science is relevant for contexts of communicative action in much the same way that rules of English grammar "must be" accepted by those who wish to be users of the English language.[26] In short, the communicative-theoretic notion of the lifeworld requires that we hold as relevant to communicative action situations those portions of "lifeworld science" which pertain to it.

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[26]An unstated proviso, of course, would be to specify "under normal circumstances." Poets may ignore rules of grammar and writers of science fiction can ignore lifeworld science. But, so I submit, such exceptions "prove" the point.

An example will make this clear. Consider the case in which one person is trying to persuade another through "communicative action" to give up smoking. Scientific evidence is cited in the argument, smoking is dangerous to health, it causes cancer, and so on. On what grounds could the relevance of this evidence be disputed? That question is different from one which would question the results, or truth, of this evidence. The die-hard smoker can question the truth of this evidence, but in so doing, thereby agrees that it is relevant. Reflection, if not experience, demonstrates the point: the relevance of that evidence cannot be disputed without at the same time giving up on statistics in general, i.e. dismissing science, a move not unlike refusing to be rational, which is a de facto and arbitrary way to end a discussion.[27]

The example demonstrates that participants in communicative action need to accept the results of empirical science as relevant to that situation. This "relevance" of lifeworld empirical science means that though this science

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[27]It is true that a condemned man, requesting a last cigarette, is not going to be impressed by statistics about the dangers of smoking. But, then again, neither is such a person engaged in "communicative action" with the officer leading the firing squad; there is no agreement to be reached here, the man's fate is decided, and so the merit or demerit of the "last smoke" is simply a question of preference, not debate or reasoning. Similarly, AIDS victims, debating whether or not to quit smoking, may grant the relevance of statistics "in general" but plead special circumstances, such as the fact that they are likely to die of AIDS long before smoking will impair their health.

need not be taken into account in the determination of the core information measure, it must be considered in the determination of the pragmatic information measure.

Given this general relevance of science, we can use this result to deal with the second difficulty of the ascertainability problem in the frequency interpretation of probability, assigning the appropriate value to the limit of the relative frequency. We simply <u>use</u> relevant lifeworld science and its results to arrive at these figures. Imagine, for example, an insurance company that offered to insure any one for anything. It would have to compute the relevant actuarial statistics to determine premiums, and these would be based on probabilities; it is those probability values that could be used to assign values to $p_0(e)$ in 4.1. In other words, we would <u>use</u> whatever science and common sense can tell us about the relative frequency of e, or, more precisely, what is <u>known</u> about this relative frequency, and arrive at probability values accordingly. This suggestion, however, will appear more plausible once we deal with the applicability problem in the frequency interpretation. It would seem that the frequency interpretation, being based on the notion of the limit of a series, would have serious problems at the applicability level. It will be useful to consider these latter difficulties before returning to the suggested solution of the ascertainability issue.

The Single Case

What we want is a way to make the concept of probability as the mathematical limit of an infinite series applicable to individual cases. Advocates of the frequency interpretation of probability admit that their concept of probability as the mathematical limit is not suitable for individual events; mathematical limits pertain to series. They suggest other terms to refer to individual probabilities, such as the <u>weight</u> of an occurrence. As noted by Salmon, in some cases this seems simple enough. We know the limit of an infinite series of coin tosses resulting in heads is ½, and we apply this value as the weight to be assigned to the outcome of heads on the next toss. But in other cases it is not so simple, e.g. what weight should be assigned to a licensed driver becoming involved in an accident causing $50 or more in damages?[28]

The problem is, as Salmon points out, that a single event can belong to many sequences, and the probabilities associated with such sequences may be different. So how do we pick the "right" sequence? That is, how do we pick the

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[28]Salmon, <u>op.cit.</u>, p. 93. Since I am not too concerned here about the niceties of terminology, I will continue to use "probability" as applicable to single events. It seems more natural to talk that way, particularly since we are primarily interested in prior probabilities of events. "Prior weights" sounds a bit odd. Technically, however, I grant that what I mean by prior probabilities should be understood as prior weights.

sequence that will yield the appropriate weight or probability to be attached to the single case? In trying to answer these questions, the problem of statistical relevance arises.

According to the frequency interpretation of probability, we can think of probability as a relationship between two classes, A and B, where A stands for the reference class, and B for the attribute class. Thus, p(A,B) stands for the probability that members of A have the property B, i.e. p(A,B) is the projected limit of the frequency with which B occurs in A. Since A could be any infinite series whatever, the problem is to decide which particular infinite sequence, or class of events, A, is appropriate for the determination of the projected limit that is to be assigned as the weight of a particular occurrence of B.[29]

Salmon then proposes as a rule of application that A be the "broadest homogeneous reference class,"[30] by which he means that the class A contains sufficient statistically

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[29]Salmon, op.cit., pp. 90 - 96.

[30]Ibid., p. 91. Though Salmon first describes this "broadest homogeneous reference class" in terms of "sufficient" statistically relevant members, it is clear, from later remarks in his argument, e.g. pp. 93 - 94, that he means "all" statistically relevant members. It is the epistemically homogeneous and practically homegenous references classes, to be discussed below, that have "sufficient" statistically relevant members, i.e. these latter classes "will do" under certain circumstances.

relevant members pertaining to the occurrence of B, and no irrelevant ones. For a reference class A to be homogenous with respect to B requires that there is no property C such that the reference class can be partitioned so that that the probability of B, given the intersection of A and C differs from p(A,B), or,

$$p(A \cap C, B) \neq p(A, B)$$

A reference class A is homogenous with respect to B when there are no such properties C.

Salmon's examples will illustrate the point. He notes that there does not appear to be any way to subdivide the reference class A of coin tosses. If, for example, we would take C as the class of even tosses, i.e. the second toss, the fourth, the sixth, the eighth, etc., then, given that the coin is fair, $p(A \cap C, B) = \frac{1}{2} = p(A, B)$. However, if we take the reference class to be licensed drivers (A), and the attribute class drivers who had accidents resulting in $50 damage or more (B), we know that this reference class is not homogenous with respect to B. Licensed drivers can be relevantly subdivided according to age, sex, habitat, amount of driving done, and other characteristics. Accordingly, before assigning a weight or probability that a particular driver will get into an accident, we would need to make these subdivisions.

Salmon recognizes that his rule for selecting the <u>broadest</u> homogeneous reference class -- which includes all that is relevant and excludes everything that is not -- is not always available. In some cases, he says, we may know that we don't have such a class, simply because we have not learned enough about occurrences of B. In such cases the best we can have is an <u>epistemically homogeneous</u> reference class. In still other cases, we may know of further relevant partitions in the reference class, but specifying these as required would simply be too expensive, or not worth the effort, i.e. make too little difference in the probability. Reference classes of that type he calls <u>practically homogeneous</u>.[31]

The choice of a homogeneous reference class, as Salmon stresses, is "an extremely practical affair,"[32] and the

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[31]<u>Ibid.</u>, p. 92. He summarizes his view as follows: "We could...say that probability is literally and exclusively a concept that applies to infinite sequences, not to single cases. If we want to find out how to behave regarding a single case, we must use probability knowledge; the problem is one of deciding how to apply such knowledge to single events. Our rules of application would tell us to find an appropriate reference class to which our single case belongs and use the value of the <u>probability</u> in that infinite sequence as the <u>weight</u> attached to the single case. The rule of selecting the broadest homogeneous reference class becomes a rule of application, not a rule for establishing values of probabilities within the theory proper. (p. 93)

[32]<u>Ibid.</u>, p. 92, and again on p. 93. "...we must balance a number of factors such as the size of the class, the amount of statistical evidence available, the cost involved in getting more data, the difficulty in effecting a relevant subdivision, and the amount at stake in the wager or decision." (p. 92) And, again, on p. 93: "...very down-to-

weights it allows to be assigned to individual cases, even large weights, "does not warrant an assertion about the occurrence or nonoccurrence of a single event."[33] This latter restriction need not trouble us here, for what we want is a value for the weight of a single case before it reportedly occurred, i.e. its prior weight or probability. We could think of this weight as the measure that would have been used to determine betting odds on the occurrence of e.

This solution to the applicability issue presupposes the resolution of the ascertainability problem, i.e. it presupposes that we are able to assign relevant probability values using these homogenous reference classes, and hence assign prior weights to individual occurrences. The applicability criterion here is met, but in an indirect way; we are told how to use probability knowledge, as Salmon emphasizes, not given a rule of inductive inference that would allow the "detachment" of the probability for the individual case from the evidence. Now, given that these probabilities are assigned to sequences of objective events, the "broadest homogeneous reference class" refers to an objectively homogeneous reference class. The probability of a certain attribute class in this objective reference class

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earth practical considerations play an important role in determining weights of single events."

[33] Ibid., p. 94.

is the projected limit of the relative frequency of the actual occurrence of that attribute, not what we happen to know or could be in a position to know about such occurrences. But both Salmon's epistemically homogeneous and the practically homogeneous reference classes are relativized with respect to what is known.[34] It would appear, therefore, that the notion of statistical relevance can be taken in two ways: as an objective statistical relevance or as an epistemically relativised relevance.

For foundational issues in the philosophy of science, the question of whether homegeneous reference classes are to be taken as objective or epistemic is an important and difficult problem. Salmon's later work defends objective homogeneity and rejects the epistemically relativised account.[35] These deeper issues, however, are of no concern to the interpretation of probability in the notion of pragmatic information measure. That notion is qualified by the context of communicative action, which presupposes a lifeworld, and thereby relativizes its "objectivity" to what can be known about such objectivity, given the resources of that lifeworld.

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[34]The "epistemically homogenous" reference class is relativized by what we do not know, the "practically homogenous" by what we do know, about what is or is not statistically relevant with respect to the attribute class.

[35]Cf. Salmon's Scientific Explanation and the Causal Structure of the World, especially chapters, 2, 3 and 4.

To put this point another way, the objectivity we are after in the determination of $p_o(e)$ in 4.1 is an epistemically-relativised objectivity. It is, however, relativised not only by what the lifeworld does, as a matter of fact, contribute in specific "situations" of communicative action, but by what it can contribute. That is, the determination of a value for this epistemically objective probability can draw, in principle, on all the resources of that lifeworld as a whole. This determination, in other words, brings all that is thus known and relevant, statistically and universally, to bear on the communication context in which the occurrence of **e** has been thematized or become an issue. In validating a news judgment proper, a journalist "steps out of" the communicative action situation, in much the same way that a politician reviewing the logical cogency of the arguments in his speech "steps out of" politics in such a review.[36]

Since this resolution of the applicability issue in the frequency interpretation of probability -- making probability knowledge applicable to particular cases -- requires this pragmatic turn to epistemically-relativised homogeneous reference classes, I can see no objection to

[36]What journalists "step into" is, I submit, nothing other than philosophy, again, in much the same way that the politician steps into "logic". As it turns out, validating a news judgment is considerably more complicated than testing an argument for validity. And that is, as previous arguments showed, because the notion of "newsworthiness" is troublesome.

doing the same to resolve the ascertainability problem as suggested above. That suggestion was that we take the values of actuarial probabilities, or as close as we can get to them, as the required values for the prior weights of the reported events. This suggested "solution" to the ascertainability problem is, as should be evident, not the solution of this problem.[37] It is only suggested as an acceptable way around this problem for the objective probability concept in the pragmatic information measure.

There is a price to be paid for this way around Hume's problem, namely that the objective probability measure in 4.1 is now relativised to lifeworld knowledge and science. Its value is not the "surprisal value" of **e**, but something else, to wit, in my terminology, the pragmatic information measure of **e**. What I wanted was a pragmatic information measure based on the likelihood of **e**'s occurrence among objectively possible alternatives. What I now have is a

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[37] I contend that this is acceptable because of (i) the eventual epistemic relativization of homogeneous reference classes at any rate (to get the weights for individual cases), and (ii) the essential lifeworld contextualization of the concepts of my subject matter. Another way to put this point would be to say that this dissertation acknowledges the existence of Hume's problem, and argues that, for the purposes of this dissertation, that problem is irrelevant. An alternative, though in my view unnecessary strategy, would be to devise restrictions of various sorts on the notion of convergence such that the infinite class of them would be reduced to just one, e.g. induction by enumeration. But that strategy, as Salmon -- who tried it -- points out, won't work. For his arguments, see his Foundations of Scientific Inference, pp. 96 - 108.

pragmatic information measure based on what is known about such objective alternatives to e.

Given that these qualifications are acceptable, my argument has shown that the frequency interpretation of probability can be made to work as the probability measure in 4.1. But can 4.1 be made to do the job intended, namely, serve as a test of the core information measure and, thereby, establish the assertoric validity of news judgments proper? That, as will become clear, requires answering two related how-questions: (1) How can the pragmatic information measure of e be determined, given the qualifications? and (2) How can this value then serve as a "test" of the core information measure?

It would appear that, given what has been said so far, a journalist would face severe difficulties in arriving at these "actuarial probabilities" for specific events. That means, so the objection would go, that, in effect, (1) the best that a journalist can do to approximate $p_o(e)$ is some guesswork, (2) the worth of which would vary directly with the journalist's knowledge of e and the context of its occurrence, and (3) leaving the question of the worth of the pragmatic information measure as a validity test wide open.

The various points made in this objection go to the heart of my argument. I could put the objection in another way, as follows: Given that the value of $p_o(e)$ has been epistemically-relativised, (4) how does it "really" differ from $p_s(e)$, the subjective "degree of belief" probability concept used in the core information measure? My reply to these various points made is as follows:

Re 1: I grant that, for practical purposes, the determination of the approximate value for $p_o(e)$ is often a matter of guesswork. So, for that matter, is the determination of the approximate value for $p_s(e)$. But in "guessing" the value of $p_o(e)$ journalists need to step out of the immediate context and consider <u>all</u> that is <u>plausibly relevant</u> to the determination of this value, not just what they individually, and, perhaps, collectively, happen to believe about e at the time they pass judgment on the newsworthiness of the report that e occurred. The guesswork leading to the approximation of $p_o(e)$ is reflectively intelligent in a way that the approximation of $p_s(e)$ need not and often cannot be "intelligent" in the same way.[38] This notion of what is "plausibly relevant" will be explained below.

Re 2: This is actually a point in my favour. I grant that the guesswork leading to a value of $p_s(e)$ is a function of what individual journalists happen to know about e and its context. The epistemic relativization in $p_o(e)$, however, extends beyond what journalists happen to know.

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[38]Deadline pressure, for example, is one such reason. Within journalism itself, estimates of the core news value of a report may be submitted to "second guessing" between editions.

Journalists may not know all relevant lifeworld knowledge pertaining to **e**. The point of the pragmatic information value "test" is that they accept, at least in principle, the relevance of this other knowledge with respect to questions about whether or not the occurrence of **e** is "really" newsworthy, i.e. they accept this knowledge as essentially relevant to the "redemption" of the objective validity claim in their news judgments.[39]

Re 3: The pragmatic information measure, while far from being the definitive test of the news,[40] does serve as a worthwhile test in precisely the way indicated: It assesses journalistic beliefs about what is the case against what is known to be the case. It is the contention of my thesis, in fact, that this pragmatic information measure, or something very close to it, is the *only* test for news.

Re 4: It should now be clear that the difference between $p_o(e)$ and $p_s(e)$ is that the determination of a value for $p_o(e)$ requires *more* knowledge; in fact, it requires *all* the knowledge that can be had that is relevant to **e**. I submit, furthermore, that this constitutes a "real"

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[39]That is, the journalists acknowledges that it is possible to make an error in *news judgment*, not just an error of fact.

[40]It is worthwhile to reconsider what a "definitive test" of the news would be? History? Social science? If so, that means, presumably, the "truths of history" and "the truths of social science." But, as I have already shown, truth cannot serve as a test for news.

epistemic difference in what can be said about the objective alternatives to e, and hence how the core news value of reports can be validated.

But in what way does the determination of a value for $p_0(e)$ require "more" knowledge than the subjective assessment by a journalist? To get to the answer of that question we need to go back to our earlier account of Salmon's epistemically-relativised homogeneous reference classes. He distinguished between an epistemically homogeneous and practically homogeneous reference class. The former is a reference class which, in fact, is likely inhomogeneous but we just don't know how to make a relevant partition of it. The latter is known to be inhomegeneous, but it is just not worthwhile to make the relevant partitions. Both of these reference classes are, as I noted, epistemically-relativised -- and in that sense "flawed" -- homogeneous reference classes with which we simply have to "make do" in assigning weights or probability measures to individual events.[41]

I would now like to suggest a similarly "practically and epistemically" homogeneous reference class to determine the value of $p_0(e)$ for the context of journalistic news judgment proper. I will call such a class a plausible

[41]There is, in other words, no difference in principle between the epistemically homogeneous and practically homogeneous reference classes Salmon describes.

homogeneous reference class. It may contain members that we think, or suspect, could be relevantly partitioned, but we don't have the time or money to do so. For example, we may suspect that the numbered companies listed in a major government contract have principals with political connections to the minister responsible, but lack the time and resources to investigate this suspicion. Or, alternatively, it may be the case that the principal of one of those numbered companies is a nephew of the deputy minister and used inside knowledge. But we just did not know this.

To assign an appropriate value to $p_0(e)$ we need a plausible homogeneous reference class, i.e. one that includes all plausibly relevant and potentially relevant members with respect to the occurrence of e and excludes the irrelevant ones. Since the determination of the membership of this class would be parasitic on lifeworld knowledge in general, we move from this lifeworld knowledge, which we can think of as the set of statements $\mathcal{L}$ -- propositions, as well as universal and statistical generalizations of all that we could possibly know given this lifeworld -- to a plausible homogeneous subset of these statements, $\mathcal{L}'$, relevant to the occurrence of e. The members of this plausibly homogenous reference class, therefore, also consist of statements. Corresponding to this epistemically-plausible homogenous reference class we can imagine an objectively-plausible homogeneous reference class, **L'**, such that $\mathcal{L}'$ and **L'** are in one-to-one correspondence. The proposition statements corresponds to events, while the generalizations (universal and statistical) in $\mathcal{L}'$ correspond to relevant-property partitions in **L'**.[42]

The strategy here to get a value for $\mathbf{p_0(e)}$, i.e. $\mathbf{p(L',e)}$ by way of what $\mathcal{L}'$ can tell us about the membership of this objectively-plausible homogeneous reference class <u>and</u> the relative frequency of the occurrence of **e** in that class.[43] What plausibility considerations are relevant to the determination of the members of $\mathcal{L}'$? To help answer that question, I now want to suggest that what makes a practically-homogeneous reference class plausible is that it meets the formal plausibility considerations that Salmon

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[42]The objective counterpart of $\mathcal{L}'$ would be the ordered set **L'**, i.e. the sequence of its members would be temporally ordered, in a way that $\mathcal{L}'$ need not be so ordered because the the statements include the temporal reference.

[43]Strictly speaking, the expression $\mathbf{p(L',e)}$, refers to the probability or relative frequency of **events like e** in the objectively-plausible homogeneous reference class **L'**. Accordingly, just what statements are to be included or excluded from $\mathcal{L}'$ (the epistemically-plausible homogeneous reference class) is a highly practical matter that will depend, to a large degree, on what kind or type of event **e** is taken to be. As already noted in the Introduction however, this dissertation assumes that, within the context of a particular lifworld, there is considerable agreement on <u>what</u> sort of event a particular event is. So this particular difficulty -- though it may be consequential with respect to news judgments proper in certain cases -- is not directly pertinent to my argument.

takes to be relevant to the prior plausibility of scientific hypotheses. He suggests three general types of plausibility considerations: formal, material and pragmatic.[44] Only the formal criteria are relevant here, however, since it may be assumed that journalists themselves will have drawn on the material and pragmatic analogues -- or what I called the professional factors -- in arriving at the core information measure.[45] The analogous formal plausibility factors that pertain to epistemically-plausible homogeneous reference

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[44]The pragmatic criteria relevant to the plausibility of a scientific theory include such things as its source (religious fanatics are not good sources, pragmatically speaking, for scientific theories). Material criteria, in the context of Salmon's argument, refer to similarities or analogies between different theories. If a proposed theory has certain analogies with currently-accepted theories, then that "analogy" is a plausibility point in its favor. Other examples he cites are simplicity, and the kinds of causality they countenance. (Salmon, op.cit., pp. 125 - 127.)

[45]That professional factor, it will be recalled, consisted of the source reliability and community impact factor. The material and pragmatic factors tend to serve as "shortcuts" in the news judgment process. The pragmatic factors could include elements of "editorial policy" ["No pro-choice stories on page 1!], "advertiser interest" ["No airplane crash news next to airline advertisements!"], "deadline pressure" ["I have a hole on page 10; I need your story now!"], "national interest" ["This paper does not publish anything the administration says is contrary to the national interest. Period!], "professional ethics" ["We don't report suicides!], and the like. The material plausibility conditions consitute the "potpourri of reasons" or the "wisdom of the craft" as captured by its conventions. What these material plausibility considerations will suggest is that previously-used and professionally-accepted reference classes for events of certain kinds will directly affect the prior weights attached to events of that sort.

classes is that the union of $\mathcal{L}'$ and $\mathcal{L}$ is consistent, that is, no member of $\mathcal{L}'$ contradicts <u>other</u> lifeworld knowledge.

The rationale for this formal plausibility criterion is not difficult to see. Just as Salmon does not want to countenance as "plausible" a potential scientific hypothesis which would entail that some or all of what counts as science now would be falsified; so too we do not want to accept as an epistemically-homogeneous reference class a set of statements which, if true, would falsify other elements of lifeworld knowledge.[46] For example, the statement "Scott rescued by mermaids" does not seem to fit in any epistemically-plausible homogeneous reference class. Any such class would, if it existed, be inconsistent with respect to other lifeworld knowledge.

Given this notion of a consistent, epistemically-plausible homogeneous reference class, all the conceptual elements to make sense of the value for $p_0(e)$ are now in place. That value is the limit of the relative frequency of e in the objective sequence of events, as that sequence and frequency are currently understood. The actual value of the limit will be, as I suggested, something like the actuarial

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[46] It should be remembered that just because some epistemically-<u>plausible</u> homogeneous reference class for an event cannot be constructed without contradicting other lifeworld knowledge, such an epistemically-plausible class could be constructed <u>after</u> the fact. Open-mindedness remains a virtue, mere credulity is not.

probability an insurance company might use to calculate premiums in case one wished to protect oneself from the effects of the occurrence of **e**.

If it be granted that the foregoing account of how the pragmatic information measure is to be understood makes sense, then the remaining question is: What does this value have to do with the objective or assertoric validity of a news judgment proper? If we now compare the respective numerical values that can be obtained for the core information measure, let us now write it as follows, $\mathbf{iR(e)}_{cim}$, and the pragmatic information measure, $\mathbf{iR(e)}_{pim}$, we have three possibilities:[47]

(1) $\mathbf{iR(e)}_{pim}$ is approximately equal to $\mathbf{iR(e)}_{cim}$

(2) $\mathbf{iR(e)}_{pim}$ is much greater than $\mathbf{iR(e)}_{cim}$

(3) $\mathbf{iR(e)}_{pim}$ is much smaller than $\mathbf{iR(e)}_{cim}$

I now submit that (1) above is the required validity criterion because when (1) obtains then the core information measure in the core news judgment approximates the objective prior probability of the event. Hence, the information associated with it is "real" information, it "points to" what is actually the case.

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[47]Given the obvious "looseness" of the numbers, I only deal with the "approximately equal", "much greater than" and "much less than" possibilities. Marginal differences in numerical values are irrelevant here. Just what is to count as "marginal" will vary with the amounts of information at stake in individual cases.

Notice, incidentally, how (2) and (3) capture the major "sins" of journalistic news judgment, or at least the essence of their errors. In case (2), a journalist has "missed the story", i.e. vastly underrated its information content. A journalist reports: "The meeting was cancelled because the speaker did not show up." Later in the story we are told that the reason for this no-show was the speaker's assassination on the way to the hall. Case (3) represents the sin of sensationalism, the information content of a report is vastly overrated. Given my account, however, these "sins" of journalistic news judgment are now seen to be instances of invalid news judgments, not just cases of "tabloid journalism" or "misguided journalism" but simply "invalid journalism."

I am at last in the position to formulate the Assertoric Validity Conditions for journalistic news judgment proper. Those conditions are:

(1) that the report judged to be newsworthy meets the conditions of the core concept of news, developed in the previous chapter, and

(2) that the core information measure associated with the event reported equals (approximately) its pragmatic information measure.

In the concluding chapter I will comment on some of the implications and limitations of this concept of assertoric validity of a news judgment proper.

CHAPTER V

Conclusions

In this final chapter I want to state my conclusions and point to what I think may be some potential applications for journalism and philosophy.

The thesis of this dissertation, as stated at the outset, was that there are "objective, rational criteria for the exercise of journalistic news judgment proper." I believe I have now shown that this objective or rational criterion is the "assertoric validity" condition for such judgments; it is that validity which redeems, in Habermas's terms, the validity claim made through the illocutionary force of the public utterance of the news narrative.

This assertoric validity condition of a journalistic news judgment proper is that the core information value of a report judged to be newsworthy approximates the pragmatic information measure associated with the occurrence of the event such reports are about. In a nutshell, what this assertoric validity condition specifies is that the subjective surprisal value used in the determination of a report's "core news value" approximates the objective, pragmatic information measure.

The first point to be made is to emphasize the limited scope of this result. Initially, the project that led to this dissertation sought to provide a "rationality framework" for journalistic news judgment in general, including the levels of narration and publication. As it stands, only news judgment proper has been covered.

The second point, which is related to the first, is that far from having set out principles that could count as a "philosophy of practice" for journalism along the lines envisaged by Frankel, I have, at best, done some of the initial spade work.[1] I tried to identify and address what I take to be a fundamental epistemic issue for journalism, but left out most of the actual "practice" of journalism, such as story-writing and ethical ramifications of publication. Later in this chapter I will indicate how

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[1]But I hope I have begun to show the way out of what I think is, on the whole, still the case when it comes to journalistic self-reflection, a state of affairs somewhat pointedly stated by H. L. Mencken's in 1924 as follows: "The old-time city room...was full of pleasant fellows, but...what they mistook for professional knowledge was simply a huge accumulation of useless facts....To the fundamental problems of their craft they apparently gave no thought; or, if they did, it was furtively and diffidently....The boys were not like fellow doctors or fellow lawyers; they were more like fellow Elks." ("Changing Journalism," American Mercury, Oct, 1924, as cited in J. L. Mott, Interpretations of Journalism: A Book of Readings, New York: F. S. Crofts & Co., 1937.

further philosophical reflection may be applied to those aspects of journalistic practice.

Implications for Journalism

Limited in scope as these results are, I nevertheless think that there is one ongoing debate in journalism to which this dissertation can make a contribution, and that is the question of truth in journalism. As the puzzles of journalistic news judgment presented in Chapter 1 showed, the question of "truth in journalism" cannot be fully dealt with in terms of Pulitzer's attlecry of "Accuracy! Accuracy! Accuracy!" I do not mean to belittle the importance of factual fidelity in journalism. I do want to suggest that there is a truth in journalism that is not to be had anywhere else, to wit, the truth of the news. It is that kind of truth, not mere accuracy of fact, that journalists are after.[2]

Journalists' soul-searching about their truth is stimulated whenever they are caught in a major error, or

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[2]It is not the kind of proto-scientific social or historical truth which Epstein, for example, like Lippmann before him, have argued journalists cannot attain -- though sometimes they are lucky and do attain that as well. See Jay Epstein, Between Fact and Fiction: The Problem of Journalism, New York: Vintage Books, 1975, especially the "Introduction: Journalism and Truth," pp. 3 - 18. But Cf. Lambeth's reply, "Any given year's crop of investigative journalism will refute" Epstein's assertion. (Committed Journalism, p. 79.)

deliberate falsehood, such as occurred when The Washington Post had to relinquish its Pulitzer Prize for publishing a story about an alleged eight-year-old heroin addict that turned out to be a fabrication, a hoax.[3] In a thoughtful commentary on this incident, Lewis H. Lapham, explaining Janet Cook's error was par for the course in the "media theater" of today noted: "We are all engaged in the same enterprise, all of us caught up in the making of analogies and metaphors, all of us seeking evocations and representations of what we can recognize as appropriately human. Stories move from truths to facts, not the other way around, and the tellers of tales endeavour to convey the essence of a thing."[4] If that is so, if, that is, news stories do move "from truths to facts", then the obvious question is: What kind of truth does it move from?

I would now like to suggest that the kind of truth animating journalism is the truth that some information "really is" newsworthy, i.e. some events "really" have an objective surprisal value in the context of the information-

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[3]The incident sparked much soul-searching among U.S. journalists. One of the best examples is Norman E. Isaacs, Untended Gates: The Mismanaged Press, New York: Columbia University Press, 1986. For a commentary on Canadian (non)reaction, see Peter Desbarats, "Truth in Journalism: A Yawning Matter?", in The News: Inside the Canadian Media, Dick MacDonald and Barrie Zwicker, eds., Ottawa, 1982.

[4]Lewis H. Lapham, "Gilding the News," Harper's, July, 1981, p. 33. My italics.

theoretic lifeworld in which we all live and move and have our being. As far as truths go, this truth of the news is a perishable commodity and often hardly worth the paper on which it is printed. Still, as the discussion of the general importance of my subject indicated, it is a truth we cannot do without. The truths of the news do not make the world intelligible, but they help us to get around in it.

I think there is yet another area in which this dissertation can be applied to issues in journalism, issues which relate to Frankel's idea of a philosophy of practice. If journalism is to strengthen its tenuous claim to professional status it will need to develop a self-critical stance toward its conventions, i.e. it needs to evolve into a discipline as well as a craft. I have tried to show one possible form of such self-criticism, at the level of news judgment proper, where the notion of the pragmatic information measure was introduced as a validity test of such judgments. While the motivation to think philosophically about their craft is, as I noted, still not a prevalent character trait among journalists, the growing power of mass media institutions may well drive them toward it, particularly when it becomes apparent that a higher level of professionalism is all that stands between the "uncoupling" of mass media journalism from the lifeworld and its total absorption into the systemic market orientation of their employers.[5] Merely "tacking" a code of ethics onto a professional practice is just not good enough. Journalism does not need the outer trappings of a profession; it needs the self-critical substance of one.[6]

With respect to journalism education, I hope that this philosophical reflection on news judgment proper may contribute to bridging the divide between "hacks" or professionals-turned-academics, who teach students the essentials of the "trade" from the "inside", and the communication scholars, on the other hand. The latter not only emphasize the importance of scholarly studies of media

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[5]Other than legislation, of course, and constitutional "guarantees", which, at least in Canada, may be suspended at a moment's notice. Cf. the Kent Royal Commission's proposal for a Canada Newspaper Act, which included provisions to insure journalistic independence from market forces. Cf. also Paul Rutherford, The Making of the Canadian Media, Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1978, p. 95, where he notes that the emergence of a "professional journalism" can serve as a check on the ever-growing power of mass media corporations.

[6]I entertain no delusions here, and agree with Romano that most managing editors today would rather "steal a sportswriter" than hire "a Bertrand Russell." Romano, op.cit., p. 38. Meanwhile, there is much wisdom and validity still in Lippmann's advice in the 1920s: "But as things stand today, if I had to advise any young man who wanted to go into newspapers, I would say to him: Go in, but before you go in, train your wants, organize your standard of living in such a way that you could quit without wrecking your life. A journalist who can do something else, if only drive a taxicab or make shoes, is a free man if he wants to be....no man ought to go seriously into journalism who is absolutely and solely dependent on what he can earn by it." (Quoted in Ronald Steel, Walter Lippmann and the American Century, New York: Vintage Books, 1981, p. 208.)

performance and professional behaviour from the "outside", of late they have also begun to emphasize the importance of social scientific methods of data collection and analysis for journalism.[7] A philosophically-based journalism curriculum could provide the umbrella under which both the theoretically-oriented approaches of social science and the practical indoctrination into the trade can be unified into a genuine professional perspective, one that does not lose sight of the "ultimate amateur" status of the practice as a whole.[8]

I would suspect, furthermore, that any such philosophical orientation would strengthen the rather tenuous role of the humanities within journalism education today. It has been suggested by journalism educators that a philosophy _of_ journalism would help to integrate journalism education in the humanistic disciplines, but, to date, not

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[7]Cf. Philip Meyer, _Precision Journalism: A Reporter's Introduction to Social Science Methods_, Second Edition, Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1979, and his _The Newspaper Survival Handbook: An Editor's Guide to Marketing Research_, Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1985.

[8]This "ultimate amateur" status of the professions is what Frankel, _op.cit._, p. 13 sought to underscore. The purpose of such a philosophy of practice, according to Frankel, is to be "practice's gadfly, alerting practitioners to the premises and the larger nonprofessional implications of their thinking." (_Op.cit._, p. 13)

much progress appears to have been made in this regard.[9] Journalists tell stories; they do not invent theories.[10] Their fact-gathering is inspired by the story they perceive in the report; not the 'explanatory' theory they bring to whatever facts they gathered.[11] However, arguments such as these require far more philosophical spade work than I have been able to achieve here. Accordingly, I now want to take a brief look ahead, at how philosophical analysis may assist in understanding and clarifying rationality issues at the story-writing and publication levels of the newsmaking process.

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[9]Cf. Theodore L. Glasser's call for a "critical theory of news" in his "Ethics in Journalism," in A Symposium on Ethics: The Role of Moral Values in Contemporary Thought, Bernard Den Ouden, ed., Washington: University Press of America, 1982. The "Oregon Report," or Planning for Curricular Change: A Report of the Project on the Future of Journalism and Mass Communication Education, Eugene, Oregon: School of Journalism, University of Oregon, 1984, recommended that joint courses between philosophy and journalism be developed. (p. 77) Cf. also Enn Raudsepp, "Reinventing Journalism Education," The Canadian Journal of Communication, May, 1989.

[10]What little research has been done on journalistic story-telling suggests that journalists do not move from 'truth' to 'facts' in the way that scientists moves from 'theory' to 'facts.' Cf. Holly S. Stocking and Nancy LaMarca, "How Journalists Describe Their Stories: Hypotheses and Assumptions in Newsmaking," Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 67, No. 2 (Fall, 1990).

[11]Which is not to deny that some analytical assessment of the news may well use such theories. But that is a derivative journalistic enterprise, one that is parasitic on the more basic news function.

Philosophical Conclusions

I would like to think that this dissertation achieved two philosophical aims, both of which were stated at the outset. The first of these was the substantive one, that this dissertation would allow us to see -- what the social scientific study of mass media obscured -- just what the rational distinction is between the journalism that fills the pages of a New York Times and a supermarket tabloid. The concept of assertoric validity shows that the tabloids lack this validity. The journalistic news judgments proper that inspire their stories (in so far as they are not mere fabrications) are based on surprisal values that fail to meet the test of the pragmatic information measure, i.e. such judgments lack an epistemically-plausible homogeneous reference class.

The second aim of this dissertation was to demonstrate by showing "that philosophy itself has much to gain by engaging in serious reflection on this business of journalism, the organized pursuit of novelty in the affairs of humankind." Whether or not I have achieved this is, perhaps, best left to other philosophers to judge. I do want to indicate, however, how the philosophical approach here begun may be extended to cover the other areas of journalistic news judgment, beginning with the "news story", that crucial element of journalism which, as Sisk had it, is all too often ignored.[12]

The point of contact between philosophy and journalism at the level of narrative is to be found, in my view, in the narratological aftermath of the explanation-in-history debate in philosophy of history, a debate that pitted the followers of William Dray against the Hempelians.[13] Another major source for the philosophical exploration of this topic is Paul Ricoeur's massive Time and Narrative[14], a three-volume work that explores the narrative forms of fiction and history. The difficulty with this wealth of material, as my initial exploration of this field has

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[12]James P. Sisk, "All the News that Fits the Story," Worldview, November, 1978. The 'story trap' of journalism, according to Sisk, is the "misuse of those patterns of fiction that everyone employs to give significant shape to information." (p. 50)

[13]The basic issue in this debate was whether or not, and to what extent, historical explanation needed to be of the same logical form as explanation in the natural sciences. The Hempelians, following C. G. Hempel, "Explanation in Science and History," in Philosophical Analysis and History, William H. Dray, ed., New York: Harper and Row, 1966, argued that it should, while William Dray, Laws and Explanation in History, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957, and his followers, many of them historians, argued for the uniqueness of historical explanation. As this debate progressed, attention became focused more and more on the explanatory force of narratives, vis-a-vis "scientific" explanations.

[14]Paul Ricoeur, Time and Narrative, Vol. I, Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, trsls. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984. Vol. II and II, by the same translators, were published in 1985 and 1988.

indicated, is that there is little or no discussion on the role of the emotions in the creative activity leading to the narrative. I suspect that this is so because the notion of "emotive input" for story creation does not seem to arise for either literature or history,[15] or, if it does, only peripherally. For journalism, however, that is not the case, and emotive input is probably the major determining factor in the choice of plot, or story, or "angle" that journalists have.[16]

Sisk's perceptive article had the diagnosis right, but offered no cure:[17]

> ...the world as we perceive it, and as newspapermen report it, is not mere sequences of events but events structured or plotted, into significant patterns, and the plots or

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[15]Emotive input here is to be distinguished from the emotive force of the narrative itself, i.e. its effect on the hearer, reader, once it is completed.

[16]In addition, of course, journalists have their stock of cliché story forms, but, as every journalist knows, a "good story" breaks the mould of the cliché.

[17]Other than to suggest, and rightly so, that the study of narrative forms becomes a basic part of journalistic training. Specifically, he mentioned Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1961; Frank Kermode, The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction, New York: Oxford University Press, 1967; and Northrop Frye, The Anatomy of Criticism. I would add to this list the Ricoeur volumes mentioned above and Hayden White, Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe, Boston: John Hopkins University Press, 1973.

> patterns are the same ones that structure our stories....In these circumstances, it is at least as important for the reporter to distinguish among plots as to distinguish between the objective and interpretive reporting of 'facts', especially since the difference between the latter two is ultimately only one of degree....
> ...those concerned with the gathering, processing, and publishing of information need to recognize that we will probably continue to rely on that repertory of marvellously efficient (if often distorting) information-processing machines constituted by our fictions -- by that body of familiar plot patterns in our fables, legends, myths, mishdrashim, and metaphors -- and that our hope must be, not ultimately to discard this repertory and possess the plain truth at last, but to refine it.[18]

I would like to suggest that just as information theory provided a way to deal with the notion of "amount of information in a report" so too, information theory can be adapted to provide an account of "emotive content" of a report. Since, within the context of communicative action in the lifeworld, no report appears in a vacuum, but in an already-structured lifeworld, a context of problems and situations that require resolution or action, the information carried by news-bearing reports relate to those situations in two ways: (a) they reduce some uncertainty, and/or (b) create new uncertainty, with respect to the

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[18]Sisk, op.cit., p. 52. I think that this point is valid, and that it is one that the advocates of so-called "precision journalism" and the new "graphics editors" have tended to overlook or minimize. But, again, that's yet another story.

resolution of those problems or action orientations. If, following a suggestion by Simonov, we treat emotion in information-theoretic terms as either an <u>excess</u> or <u>surfeit</u> of information available over information required for the resolution of these lifeworld problem situations, a notion of emotive content of a report may be developed.[19]

This notion of emotive content in a report can then be used to develop a narrative rationality condition in terms of the relationship between the emotive force of the narrative and the emotive content of the report.[20] Again following Habermasian ideas that the illocutionary force of the uttered narrative, in addition to its explicit objective validity claim, also makes a normative validity claim, the <u>narrative's rationality</u> can then be analyzed in terms of its normative, or valuational "appropriateness" in the context of the lifeworld.

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[19]See Pavel V. Simonov, "The Information Theory of Emotion," in <u>Value Theory in Philosophy and Social Science</u>, Ervin Laszlo and James B. Wilbur, eds., New York, 1973.

[20]Cf. Sisk, again, on this very point: "There are probably as many 'facts' accurately reported in the <u>National Enquirer</u>, <u>The Star</u>, or <u>Midnight Globe</u> as in the <u>New York Times</u> or <u>Washington Post</u>. What is objectionable in the tabloids is the grossness of the plots that both determine and are served by the selection of information....If, as Wicker says, most [news] organizations 'don't do well at the sensitive and subtle task of putting yesterday's events in longer and deeper perspective,' part of the reason is that they have cooperated in the debasement of the necessary means." (p. 51) (The reference here is to Tom Wicker, whose autobiography <u>On Press</u>, New York: Viking Press, 1978, Sisk was reviewing.)

In addition, this focus on the emotive content of a narrative can then be extended, using arguments suggested by Solomon, to the realm of publication. Solomon's theory of the emotions is that their natural function is to enhance an individual's sense of self-esteem or well-being, something that is the case, in a pathological way, even with what we would call self-destructive emotions.[21] In a way roughly analogous with this view, I would then argue that the public utterance of news narratives is 'sincere' or 'truthful'[22] only when intended to serve the ultimate goal of a community's well-being. The latter, obviously, raises the question of "what community?" and thus opens up the field of social and political philosophy, such as the work of Kant and Rawls,[23] to mention but two philosophers who have tried

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[21]Cf. Robert C. Solomon, The Passions, New York, 1976.

[22]The required "validity condition" for the illocutionary force of communicative action in the personal world. It is, incidentally, this validity condition that would constitute the normative backdrop of journalism ethics, not the empirical consequences. Only in this way can journalism escape, I think, the pitfalls of a means-end utilitarianism and market-bound frame of reference. Cf. my "Some Remarks on Adam's 'Making Ethical Sense of Journalism," in Journalism Ethics: Mapping the Terrain, Jocelyn Downie, ed., London, Ont.: Westminster Institute for Ethics and Human Values, 1990.

[23]Cf. John Rawls, "Kantian Reconstructivism in Moral Theory," The Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 77 (1980), as well as his Theory of Justice, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971.

to develop the notion of what a community of rational beings would look like.

All these ideas are nothing but promissory notes; I do not claim to have established any of these points, though I would like to suggest that, given the results of this dissertation, they seem to be ideas worth pursuing.

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